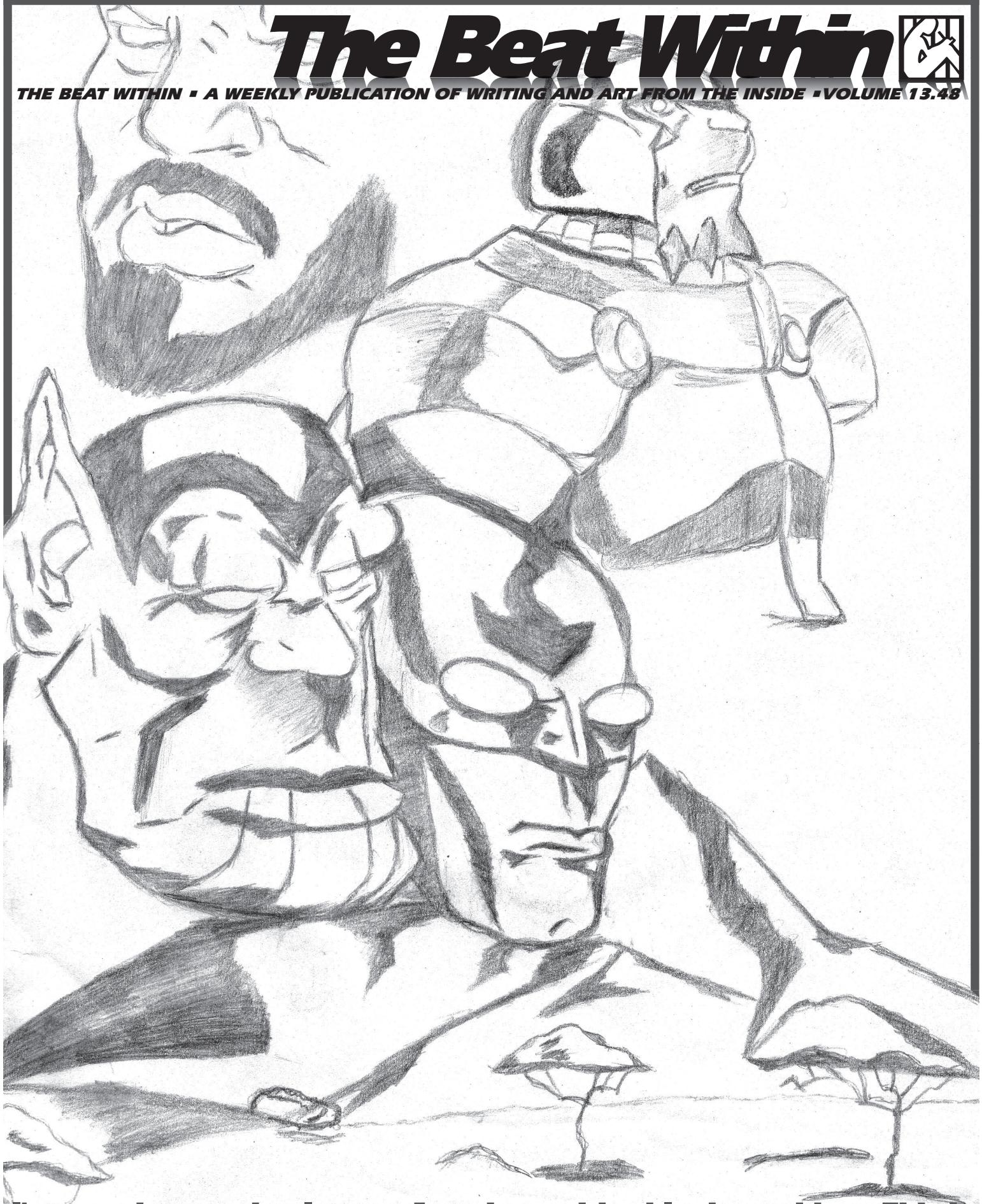


The Beat Within

THE BEAT WITHIN - A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF WRITING AND ART FROM THE INSIDE - VOLUME 13.48



I'm proud to say that I am an American with a black president. This is history being made. I'm living it and I'm proud to witness it.

read the rest of Dante's POW on page 7

Here we are another Beat for your reading pleasure. Whew wee! Issue 13.48 in it's rawest form, without getting any of us into trouble, so yeah, we do keep some of our writers truths/feelings under wraps. Yet, as most of you know, The Beat is all about enlightening the reader.

What we read, particularly in this issue is how many of you young writers unfortunately have not a clue how crucial this venue is to our readers, so you spill your truths, or should we say bull shhh, thinking it is cool to speak about being down for the hood, your color, you crew, and how you will forever stand tall, full of pride and honor for the set, yet, where is the set when you sit in the hall, or when you are standing in front of the judge who sentences you to 18 months out of state, or says you are unfit for juvenile court, and finds you fit to be tried as an adult. Sure, part of what The Beat is all about is giving you a voice, and not dictating you as to what you must say, so yes, you write what is most important to you, and over time some of you grow as writers, grow as confident thinkers, grow as leaders and your writing changes. You see beyond the hood, the fake, the drama that the so-called down homies brought on to you, yet you never hear a peep from the crew when you're locked up. You never get the letter, or the message from mom, that your boys came by to check in on her or you. Basically you're out of sight, out of mind. And from your writing you convey this experience, this truth, and sure a few get it when you put it down as a writer, and accept, understand it, and take a better look at themselves, while many totally disregard it altogether, and have to experience the crap for themselves.

Next week this editor along with a colleague will be heading back east to meet potential funders, allies, and colleagues to continue in our pursuit to move forward in implementing The Beat Within program back east. We are very much looking forward to our travels to Washington DC, as we reconnect with our new friends.

As most of you readers know, we have been featuring the writings of our young friends who are housed in the DYRS (Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services). Most writers are in the Oak Hill Academy, which is a lock-up in Laurel, Maryland. Also, we have been taking giant steps in creating a partnership with the Free Minds Book Club and Writing Program. Each week Free Minds works with the young men, being tried as adults, who are housed in the DC County Jail. We have also featured their stellar work in our BWO section, and we happen to be showcasing the work they did with us during our last visit to DC, when we were the guest of Free Minds and met the young men in the jailhouse, so take a look!

The topics in this issue came on the heals of the presidential election. The first topic, "This historic election" — On Tuesday, November 4, 2008, this country did something that many people believed would never happen by electing a black man as President of the United States (check out the Editor's Note in today's Beat). We'd like to know your thoughts about this first in American history. Does it mean something to you? Are you surprised that it happened? Does it change anything you believe about this country? Do you think things will be better, worse or the same under a President Barack than under a President Bush? What changes do

you believe will come about, if any? Do you think this is a sign that the United States of America is growing up? If the country is able to move beyond its racist past, what are the problems in your own life that you think you can move beyond?

This second topic is quite interesting how our young writers attempt to tackle "The promise versus the reality of gangs/sets/hood's" — What did you believe about gang or 'hood life before you became affiliated? Who told you what to expect, and why did joining a gang appeal to you? Was joining a gang or a set a family tradition, or were you the first in your family to join? After you were part of this lifestyle, did you find the reality the same as what you expected it to be? What were the biggest surprises for you after you entered this lifestyle? Remembering that many young people read The Beat (and are influenced by what they read), what can you tell us about the things that attracted you to the gang/hood/set, and the reality of that life that surprised you, and might lead a youngster to think twice before "jumping in."

Last but not least, this last topic is surprisingly challenging for our writers to "Imagining a different reality" — Can you put yourself in someone else's shoes for the time it takes us to conduct a Beat workshop, and write from that person's viewpoint? If you are black, can you imagine yourself as a white or Latino or Asian, and write as if you were one? If you are male, can you write a piece from a female's point of view? Can you put yourself in the shoes of a counselor and write what it would be like if you were one? Or the President of the United States? Or, can you imagine yourself on death row, or serving a life sentence in prison? So, for those brave enough to imagine the world in someone else's shoes, write a piece for The Beat as if you were a different person.

OK, before we close this ed note, we want to remind you avid readers that next week's issue (13.49) will be our last for 2008, so stay focused and keep spilling your truths 'cause we are not holding any punches when we enter the 2009 season of The Beat Within, our fourteenth year as a weekly publication of writing and art from inside juvenile hall and beyond.

With the New Year rapidly approaching, we ask, what new challenges await us? What surprises will occur? What writers will step up and stagger us with their insights and loyalty to self and us readers? We already know we have our work cut out for us. We know it's going to be a lot of work. We know we will need to count on every single one of you to play a role in our success in this New Year, as you have done this year and years past. The story of The Beat is an important story, so with each attempt you make via letter or contribution, helps us understand our worth to you and our communities. You tell us how we can improve our work in the community and in the institutions we visit each week. We need to hear from you. We embrace your insight, as you know, because this forum was created for you writers inside to educate your peers, the professionals and the outsiders who have access to this gem we love, The Beat Within.

This issue goes out to the young people who flock to our office each day, to connect, to work, to share and embrace the good that comes out of this space — the magazine and the office of The Beat Within.

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco, Maricopa County Arizona, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Alameda, Bernalillo County New Mexico, Santa Cruz and Marin County Juvenile Halls. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SFCA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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Gang, Sets, & Hoods

Is it the same from what you heard from on the streets
 Some of us are young soldiers marching on our feet
 Some will say once in, you're in for a life
 But to get out your homeboys stick you with a knife
 All types of different sets, hoods, and gangs
 If your down for it do you gang bang
 Life throws you obstacles what do you choose
 Kicking it with family or your patnas and dudes
 Putting in work loading up the glock
 Wrong neighborhoods want your head so you might get shot
 Dodging whatever the choppas spit
 Gang task on you 'cause you pulled a lick
 New laws get you more time its called gang enhancement
 Too scared to walk so you take the daily transit
 Is it really worth it to get shot for color or hoods?
 Now parents grieving because you didn't do what you should
 Black suits black dresses and a closed casket
 People buying you flowers in a nice basket
 Too bad you didn't get to see them though
 Wasn't paying attention when you was sniffing that snow
 Pulled that rag out and banged to the fullest
 Now your dead 6 feet under that's the truest
 Now you not a goon or reppin' your gang, hood, or St.
 Cause you did it at the wrong place and got hit with a tech
 So tell me is it worth it to risk your life?
 Be careful of the out come because it's not always nice

-Sean, Solano

From The Beat: Hey Sean another well-written piece! We know so many young people looking at a lot of time, who know they are lucky to be alive but have deep and profound regrets. Most of them say it was not worth it. If you see this give us a call, we're waiting to hear from you. We really hope all is well, and you stay as consistent with your goals as you always do with your writing.

Be Your Own Gang

I personally have never been in a gang. I used to say that I was from Richmond, and that was my gang. It took me sometime to learn that all that does is cause more trouble and it's stupid. Gangs and hoods, that's all driven by fear, it's all an immature little game. Think about what you're fighting for? Who's your real family? What did those people do to you?

While I was in CYA, I learned to be my own gang, my own man, I stood alone. I didn't need anyone to have my back; I didn't need to be from somewhere to be tough. Who cares what someone else thinks? I knew what I was about, I know who I am. I only fight when I have a reason, I only tell someone where I'm from to find something we may both relate to, and my family is my parents, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, and grandparents.

I would die for my family and possibly a friend, but I won't tell them that in fear as some gang members may do hoping that the other would die for them, even though they're lying. You might tell them that because you're scared, you don't want to die, you want them to die for you. It's all protection and it's all driven by fear. Be you, quit trying to fit in and find protection. Be your own gang, make your own choices, and love your real family.

-Babyface, Solano

From The Beat: We agree with much you say, and also know that some do not have families that have loved them well...so that part is not always so simple. It is a life-long process to learn to let other people think what they will, and do what is right for you. You sound really strong and we wish you well on your journey.

All My Life

All my life I've been running from my problems, and trouble but it's not that easy because it comes right back and it tries to hit harder then before. Well I'm saying this because it happened to me I'm locked up for something I did not do. Well right now I'm facing 25 with a L-well I didn't do it well shhh my hole life is on the line with nothing else to do but pray and ask God to help me in my life.

It feels like I'm in a big dream and I can't wake up. This ain't no joke-life in prison. Well what I think is we all need a place to stand and be are selves and stop acting like someone we're not 'cause you can run from your problems but they're going to still be there when you stop running.

Well this gang shhh is no joke as well but the reason I say we all need a place to stand is because I was reading this book by Jimmy Santiago Baca and he went through what I'm going through. He came to talk to us and told us he likes to write poems and I do too. He writes books and I'm writing a book as well. He made that movie Blood In Blood Out and he's about to make part 2 of the movie. Well right now I'm losing every thing my freedom, life, and everyone I love. Well I'm out so remember life's no joke and you can't run from it.

-Young One Jesus, Solano

From The Beat: You are facing a lot of uncertainty. We are really glad you had a chance to meet JS Baca, he's gone a long way through a lot of difficulty as well. Keep writing and praying and taking care of yourself. You are right you can't run-you have to face each day as best as you can.

Greed

I write about greed because greed is what brings me to this place. Why do we feel greed? Because it is a feeling, one that I can't control. When I don't feed my greed, I feel it more. I always want more and it's hard to be satisfied, at least when it's available.

On the outs money is available, so I strive to get more and more of it. A little is not enough. A lot is not enough. I've realized it over time, because over time, my greed has gotten stronger and stronger. This doesn't mean I don't care about anything else, because I care about a lot, but it explains my choices. It explains why I steal, why I smoke, why I pop, why I might also play with my nose. My greed needs to be satisfied. I always want something to be satisfied.

Sometimes I wonder how or why it's come to this point. But when I think logically and reasonably I know it needs to be reduced, not even completely stopped. As much as I don't want to, I know I need to. Sometimes I have told myself to stop, especially when I'm in trouble, like these times now. I want to, but when the opportunity is available, my greed kicks in again.

So now I plan reasonably. Instead of nothing at all, I plan on still blowin'. Instead of stealing, I plan on relying on only a job. Instead of slanging, I'll rely on a job. I know change is necessary, and that change is just control.

-D, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You are right to look for the roots of your constant 'wanting'. There are wise people throughout history who suggest that fear is at the root of greed. We are afraid that if we don't have more, and more, and still more, we won't be alright, we won't be OK. But of course, if we look around, carefully, with full attention, we discover that there are many people on the planet who have very little in the way of possessions, but who give every appearance of being happy. In other words, they're OK without a ton of stuff. We all need the necessities - food, shelter, clothing, education, but will ten pairs of shoes improve the quality of your life. Think about what you actually need, and ask yourself why you need what you're used to. Your greed hasn't served you very well. It's led to your freedom being taken away. Learn from what hasn't worked. Stop repeating your mistakes, unless, of course, you prefer jail. You can always get as much of that as you want.

My Mistakes

Q-vo Beat Today I'm going to write about gangs. The reason I became a gang member is because most of my family are gang members. And growing up in a city like Los Angeles didn't help the situation.

Before I even got involved with gangs meaning doing gang activities I thought it was a glorious life, but come to find out it was the complete opposite. They say you learn from your mistakes, well I'd like to think I learned from my mistakes.

Hopefully when I get out I will be able to stay out of trouble, but for now I'm still sitting here in max waiting to get transferred to the California Youth Authority. Well that's all I have to say for today pues alrato.

-Gilberto, Alameda

From The Beat: You have time to study and develop your interests while your locked down so that when you get out you can expand on them in the world, find a job, and have a good life.

If I Could Go Back I Would Change My Life

I'm from a hood and I always knew what it would be like cause I grew up around it. I have been in it all my life so I knew what was in store for me. So there was no surprise on what happens in the street it's all over in every hood that you go to you will see some kind of violence if you are really from a hood then you know what to expect.

I just want let some people know out there that being from a hood it isn't all that people think that it is people in the hood have good times and bad times some are good but like me I have been thru a lot in my life going thru all the guns and being shot twice it isn't nothing to be proud about but things happen when you are from a set or a hood.

If I could go back I would change the way that I live. I do really wish that I could change some of the things that I have done to people and the things some people have done to me. I just want get out and be with my daughter. I know she misses me a lot, just like I miss her and I just wish I could go back and never come back to jail.

-Tekei, Solano

From the Beat: Was it the birth of your daughter that helped you realize what is really most important to you? We wish you well, and are glad you are committed to your daughter. She needs you with her, not in prison.

Life is Real

What's up Beat. This yo boy D- Baby and I'm here to tell you that life is the realist thing around right now. If you didn't know that, you is behind the game. I'm telling you this because ninjas is dyin' and mommas is cryin'. That's the real.

I can't stand this shhh. Nobody can really just go outside and think that everything is just ok. Little kids is now carrying guns and nobody can stop them except other guns or the police.

This is the life people live and the life people want to get away from. Life is scary, you don't know when you gon' die or how you gon' die. Death is scary and nobody can stop it except for Jesus.

This is my life and I don't want it to end. I love life.

-Damar, Alameda

From The Beat: This is a really good piece - thanks for sharing your thoughts. If you really want to keep living, and you don't think you can safely do that in your community, it's time to start coming up with a plan to get out. You may not get out right away, but if you work hard in school and get a job, you can make your way into college, a college that is in a different place, and you'll be out and on your way. It's possible if you work at it!

Good-Bye

If I had the opportunity to go away
And be you for a day
To be real, I would not know what to do
If I ever had the chance to be you
And be able to feel the way you do
And feel all the things I made you go through
To be true, I will love, too
I did you wrong, and I do not know why
And sometimes, all alone, I cry
Wishing just to be able to say, "Perdon!"
I want you to move on
BM, I want you to be strong
You will always be in the depths of mi corazon
It's time for us to be strong
And keep going with our lives, but this time, we have to go alone
And try to find happiness in our own
And with this, I say, "Good-bye"
To my BM and my all,

-Lavelle, San Francisco

From The Beat: This very sad poem is also the best you've ever written for The Beat. We feel the tears that you cry alone, and we hope that you will be able to find that happiness you seek, even going your own way. Nobody knows the future, so do what you can to make yours the one you want.

Fly Boy Adventures: To My Lil' Girl

Mic check, 1,2,1,2... Wha's uppers with The Bet? You know me, the flyest ninja unda the sun. Skip just hit that 18 mark on Sunday, so ya boy a big dawg, for those who ain't been peeped game. But you know, bein' 18 ain't all candy and Hallmark cards, ha dig? It requires a lot of responsibility and maturity.

One of the major responsibilities I got to improve on is my lil' angel, Alyssa, I been a pretty much cool parent towards her along with her mom and the help of my nanny — excluding the frequent amount of tie I done been in and out of here. I done enrolled her in gymnastics school, spent a lot of time with her on the outs. I keep her in the latest attire. Most of all, I have nurtured her and cared for her so much that her first word was "Daddy,"

I love the hell outta that girl, more than life itself, but my decision-making has put my love on a halt. I don't wanna be a part time parent. I want her to be better than her mama and daddy. I don't want her to endure the same bullshhh that I went through as a kid. So that why it bring me to damn near tears when I see her at my court dates.

But yeah, she goin' on four years old on Dec. 27th, so I gotta double up on the gifts. She goin' to Mexico with her mama and my nana next week, so that's a good experience for her while she's young. She will be there until Christmas and go back and return in February, so that's cool for her and some time for me to do some soul searchin' so when she come back she will have a reinvigorated pops that won't make his same childish mistakes that has him caught up right now.

But I should be gone on the 17th. Moms moved to Fairfield, so that's where I'm headed. Pray for me, Beat.

-Fly Boy Skip, San Francisco

From The Beat: The only thing we can think of to add to your own very wise counsel is this: keep writing to us even if you're on the outs. We want to know how reinvigorated you will be, what changes you're making to ensure that you don't spend any more time away from Alyssa. It's thrilling to hear your own baby speaking her first words (the first words of most babies is Daddy or Da Da...), but we don't want you to miss the rest of the miracles that are part of every child's development. And we don't want her to miss having a loving and nurturing father at home. You've a great addition to this workshop, Skip, and we expect wonderful things from you. Don't disappoint us, Alyssa, your mom or yourself!

Why?

My name is Greg and I just wanted to talk about things that don't really get talked about.

I am a 16-year-old kid that has had the opportunity to live life in some very unfortunate situations. I was hiding a lot of my feelings inside of myself for most of my life. I was never the kind of person to be in a gang or set, but "I got down for what I believed."

I got into a lot of fights and started working out when I was a young teen. The first time I was locked up I was a young teen. I never wanted to come back. I started trying to stay out of trouble by playing football and boxing. The football paid off but the boxing led to me getting into more fights. It also didn't help that I was a lot more confident in what I was able to do with my hands.

Two years later I was locked up again. But I have learned that everybody on this earth has the ability to make a decision. Second, I learned that all decisions have a consequence, whether it is good or bad. Third, I learned to believe in my abilities; and that and myself is how I found out how to express my feelings in rap and poetry. I put something here for The Beat, I hope everyone enjoys it:

Why?

Why did Eve take a bite of the fruit?
 When she knew specifically what God told her to do
 Then she gave it to Adam so he's eating it too
 Father forgive them for they know not what they do
 Why the jails and the prisons all over booked?
 Why the problem with the society all over looked?
 Why the kids and these kids and these youngsters exposed to crooks,
 Taught to steal before they learn how to open a book
 Why these girls having sex just to please their men
 The same men abusing them with words and their hands,
 They try to fight they getting raped
 They don't stand a chance
 And every time they tell somebody they don't understand
 Why these parents can't take care of kids they had?
 So they left to live life without a mom and dad
 Never learning the values that they need to have
 Here the questions go so where the answers at?

I hope everybody enjoyed my feelings. Thank you!

-Greg, Solano

From The Beat: We're glad you can use your hands to write as well as to fight. We haven't seen you at Challenge, so we hope you are doing well. Good luck and keep writing-and thank you!

Forget The Hood

What good with The Beat? Y'all know who this be, yo' boy Rocket holdin' or trying to hold it down. But this shhh hard. I been going to court. For the last week I been shhhing bricks.

I think this jail shhh really change my life. The way I see shhh, I will never go back to the block. I'm going to go to school, get a job and stay out the way 'cause it's ninjas that want my head. But I want to live, so forget all the street shhh and beer shhh. It over. Forget the block!

-Rocket, San Francisco

From The Beat: You are very smart to see that wanting to live is not compatible with the lifestyle you were living. So we take our hats off to you for making the decision to leave that lifestyle behind! What do you think the biggest obstacle you'll have to overcome when you get out of here? What would you like to study at school, and what kind of work would you like to do? What's going on in court that's causing you so much anxiety?

Living In The Hood

Living in the hood for me is crazy. A whole lot of things have happened in the hood and to me. I seen my homies get shot-killed, and I seen them getting money-the money what made me get in the game. But I know it ain't all good. I know people that's doin' life in jail and hard time.

Everybody thinks doin' this hood life is it ninjas having a lot of girls, money and cars-but they had to do a lot to get it. It's not all glamorous people gotta go through funk runnin' from bullets,

5-0, goin' to jail-people on parole can't get jobs.

Everything they get comes at a cost. It's a lot of things that go on in the hood I just said a little bit. But living in the hood is not all that good or bad that people say. I got a front row seat of it I could keep on goin' but I'm gone leave it at this.

I hope Barack Obama change some things make things better.

-Young Boobie, Alameda

From The Beat: You say "Everything they get comes at a cost," and it seems like you don't necessarily think the cost is worth it—Girls, money and cars don't get to come to jail. When you are released how do you plan to get money? We have to help Obama make these changes...good piece Boobie.

The So-Called Justice System (My Opinion)

Que onda, Beat? Once again, it's the homegirl Grumps just kickin' back with my head up high. Another day, another night. Freedom still far from my sight.

So, simón, as you can see from the title, none of the topics got me thinkin' tonight, so I'ma drop a short piece regarding la sistema. It's a trip how the palabra (word) "Justice" is included in the same sentence as the palabra "System" considering the fact that there's hardly any justice applied these days. Foo's is getting harassed, stalked, beaten, etc. by la jura (cops) daily, not to mention getting found guilty—or, if an adult, convicted—of crimes purely over a racist jury selection or a lazy judge who has more cases than he/she wants to deal with and, as a result, doesn't handle it properly.

Foo's getting all types of shhh planted on 'em by a crooked jura, not to mention framed. I've seen juras take advantage of their authority, talkin' all kinds of shhh just 'cause they assume they can get away with it. That's just a small part of the reasons I plan to attend law school and study to be a successful criminal defense lawyer, porque (because) the injustice that is circulating through the system is continuing to expand rapidly.

The people within these brick walls need proper representation from someone who will truly dedicate themselves to their clients' cases with a force that will leave the DA speechless. I'm confident I can be that person.

My main fuel fort keeping myself dedicated to that goal is my personal experiences con la jura y public defenders who couldn't care less of the outcome of my case, or who even at times seemed to be working mano y mano (hand in hand) with the DA!

Pues, I'ma have to end this piece at that, even though I could write a libro (book) on this subject. Pero, time is up, so that's that. Orale pues, Beat. Este jaina (this girl) is out. Alrato!

-Grumpy, San Francisco

From The Beat: We can't tell you how thrilled we are to read that you want to become the best damn defense attorney possible. You are so right, the need is overwhelming. We have worked in criminal cases (capital cases) in which cops have lied on the witness stand, judges have told our clients to "shut up," and lawyers have planned their vacations while in court "defending" their clients. Your skills are abundant and well suited to criminal defense (if you can leave the gang stuff behind...), and we would love to be in court to watch you practice your craft. In the meantime, have you ever heard of Clarence Darrow? We believe him to be the greatest criminal defense lawyer this country has ever produced, and we encourage you to try to read some of his writings. In the meantime, we stand behind your lofty goal 100%.

Yes, We Can!

I'm proud to say that I am an American with a black president. This is history being made. I'm living it and I'm proud to witness it.

My grandmother grew up in a time where she was unable to vote, mainly for two reasons: one, she was a black woman, but mainly because at the time the United States was sexist and being a woman she could not vote. So it's good that this black man became president. Now the world will see that black people can accomplish what they want. It'll show that black people can be successful in life. It'll show that we are capable of making big decisions.

Yes we can!

-Dante, San Francisco

From The Beat: We can only imagine how Barack Obama's victory affected the older African-American generation that grew up fighting for such basic rights as living where they want, being served in restaurants, and attending decent schools. Like us, she probably never believed this day would come. Even though women got the right to vote way back in 1920 (the 19th Amendment), sexism still kept women from reaching their full potentials. We have made so much progress in these areas, although sexism and racism still infect our society. In fact, we think the world already knew that black people could accomplish anything that white people could accomplish — but American people lagged behind the rest of the world. Now, maybe our own racists will be able to test their prejudices against reality.

Gangs/Sets/'Hoods

Hello. My name is Henry, and I'm going to be talking about gangs. When I was younger, I was starting to feel gang affiliated. I thought it was just a gang thing, but then you start to see it's very dangerous. It's something of colors and revenge. But then I started to see that you get shot at, you get in fights, and you put your life on the line. You may not be a gang member, and you still will get shot at.

I see everywhere Bloods, Crips, Sureños, Norteños. Mostly if you in a gang, it's for revenge, or protection of getting shot at 'cause you wanted to be in a gang. I got out 'cause I seen how many people I loved died, chopped p, crushed by a lot of things that are very painful.

-Henry, San Francisco

From The Beat: It takes real courage to see the reality of gang violence for the terrible destruction and death it's causing, and then to pull yourself away from gangs because of what you've seen and experienced. We're so sorry that it took so much death and destruction for you to see things differently, and we hope that now that you've made the decision to drop out, you'll find your life and future improving. One day, you may be able to look at the carnage you have suffered and write about it in detail so that others might be prevented from the same tragic experiences.

If I Was A Boy

If I was a boy, would I be a better person? Would I be a player? Would I be a good boyfriend? If I were a boy, would I like school? Would I go every day? If I were a boy, would I like boys? Would I be gay? If I was a boy, could I stay out later, go wherever I want?

If I were a boy, I would be a better person! If I were a boy, I would be the perfect boyfriend! If I was a boy, I would love school. I would go every day! If I were a boy, being gay or straight would be fine with me. If I were a boy... I can't tell you much if I were a boy because I'm a girl, but I know I would be great.

-Brittany, San Francisco

From The Beat: Oh, Brittany, you're already great! We love this piece for two reasons. First, very few writers took up our offer to be someone else (on paper), mostly because they don't have the courage you do to put yourself in someone else's shoes. But beyond that, what you wrote is so wonderful! Even though we don't know why you think you'd be a better boy than you are a girl, we loved all your questions and particularly loved all your answers. Girl or boy, you're special!

Young Girl Young Girl

Young girl young girl

Where is yo' momma? walkin' like that, you gon' cause drama. What's yo' name? And where you from? I'm feelin' you, and there's more to come.

Young girl young girl

You're more than fine

Come chill with me

I'm gonna make you mines

Young girl young girl

No don't cry I can hear your heart by just one price

Just follow my rules

And you'll have the best of life

Young girl young girl

Hear my game

Most girls play a

And get paid all day

I can turn that frown into a smile

Let your feelings blow away

And let me know if you're down Young girl young girl

I know what's best for you

Tryna play hard to get

But I know you easy boo

Young girl young girl

Think you too good

Head high in the air

Stands tall that look of who dare?

Young girl young girl

With no such shame

I guess my game is weak

Young girl young girl

Stay strong as can be

-Shantell, Alameda

From The Beat: You mimic the BS that pimps throw at young girls to seduce and exploit them perfectly, and we love the way you twist it at the end, beating the pimp at his own game. We turn your words back to you: Stay strong as can be.

Learning The Hard Way

I believed that the hood life was a gangster's paradise before I joined. I thought it was good that I would have protection at all times, that I would live a good life without having to go to work or school and that bangin' and selling drugs was the shhh to me.

A lot of people influenced me to join because they never said the negative about it and I fell into the game and now I'm too deep into the hole to pull myself out, but now I do realize about the gang life — that it has no meaning, no purpose.

You get a good reputation and a lot of respect, but what does it matter if I'm six feet deep or locked up.

My life here in this institution has taught me many lessons, like to know how much my life means to me and one of the biggest surprises was the pressure that that I am always having to put up with ... always showing what you're about, "always wearing a mask," but when you go back to your cell, the mask comes off and the things that attracted me to these gangs were friends, wanting to do what everyone else was doing, trying to be cool and knowing how to fight.

There are so many things, but I can't do this gang lifestyle anymore and one thing I can recommend is that if you can handle doin' time, then that's on you, but this ain't no place for me. Late.

-Drifter, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It is rare to have anyone speak out this honestly about the realities of the game, so thank you so much for expressing your feelings and your truth. Maybe the longer you ponder this, you'll find that there are ways out.

Another Day Wasted

Another day wasted, another tear shed
 Another strip search over a broken piece of lead
 Another head busted so there goes another phase
 Another day wasted in this stinky ass place
 Another sad letter from my one and only girl
 Another damn morning with me needing to hurl
 Another court date, another meeting with the judge
 Another damn victim gonna hit me with a grudge
 Another activity, another game of handball
 Another day talking to my girl on a collect call
 Another day in these showers using this cheap soap
 Another day in a visit with my aunt giving my hope
 Another day stressed missing my fam
 Another door sealed like the shell of a clam
 Another prayer to God for forgiveness for my sins
 But at least it's another day in the beat within

- Johnny, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, this piece really captures the rhythm and the pace of being locked up, and all the little nuances. Great work - it is great to see your writing rise up and take this powerful shape.

Life may seem easier on the outs. It is actually much harder, but the difficulty is relieved by the gratification we receive from the things we achieve.

Which Is Easier?

At first sight of this prompt, we all laughed. "Which is easier" ... a stupid, obvious question, I thought. Obviously, my immediate reaction was that life is easier on the outs. It wasn't until I read through the prompt and considered what the word easy really meant that I realized that my initial naïve response was not only far from, but the opposite of what the answer really is. I realized that I had quickly associated the word 'easy' - basic, not hard - with fun, pleasurable, full of love, and, constant satisfaction.

Don't get me wrong - life on the outs has its fair share of sorrow, tragedy, and pain. But in comparison to life in here, 'outs' life can be portrayed as non stop fun, excitement, adventure, pleasure, love, and freedom.

When these intricate parts of life are taken from us, we sense adversity. We automatically assume that life has become harder than ever. The reality is that in institutions such as juvenile hall, life becomes easier than ever. The hard part we are sensing is the difficulty in coping with this new lifestyle of no excitement and the regimented structure. One really has no expectations. We are asked to do some things, but forced to do nothing. Life is actually so easy in here. But it's hard to deal with the loss of the lives we miss so much on the outs.

Life may seem easier on the outs. It is actually much harder, but the difficulty is relieved by the gratification we receive from the things we achieve.

I can't wait to get out....

-Johannes, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Beautifully written. It is a wise person who recognizes that everything in life bears a price tag. What do we really want? What are we prepared to pay for it - not in terms of money, but in good intentions and hard work? Your thoughtful response to our topic is much appreciated.

My Rap 'Bout My Life (currently in juvenile hall)

My life in the hall, I'm surrounded by walls
 This life style ain't solid
 five minute phone calls
 Momma crying
 'cause I'm messing up
 Judge just detained me and I'm like for what?
 Violation of probation and I'm peeing dirty
 Now I'm stuck in the hall
 stressing and worried
 Don't know when I'm going home
 So I keep my head up
 They want to give me an hour
 'cause I didn't take it up
 Man I miss my girl and my momma too
 All I do is pray
 keep praying for you
 Every night I think about what I'm going to do
 I want to do right
 on my momma I do
 Life is hard so I do nothing but pray
 Wishing and hoping for that one day
 The day they call me and tell me I'm gone
 Swear I'm never coming back
 I'm gonna never go wrong
 I stress, rest and always feel depressed
 God please help me
 I need you the best
 No one can help me like the father above
 I run in the streets, I be in the dubs
 But I want to be somebody and make something out my life
 I want to have kids and have a beautiful wife
 So why I'm stuck here, here in these walls
 I'm just another victim of juvenile hall.

-Tyrone, Alameda

From The Beat: This is a standout poem. Nice. It really shows us how you're really feeling. We're glad you shared this piece with us readers. You are a victim of your environment but it's up to you to bring yourself up and get yourself out of the system. You're the underdog, and you can continue to let yourself be victimized or you can put up a fight and strive to make things better.

Life Style (Stand Out)

Gang members tend to die young
 Gang members often carry a gun
 Gang members play life like a game
 Gang members also endure a lot of
 Frustration and pain
 Gang members could also love
 But they choose to trust no one
 Not even their blood
 Gang members try to run away from
 Frustration and pain
 But gang members are always locked up
 And never change
 True gang members never give up
 Anyone's name
 True gang member dedicated the
 Life to this so-called game
 Not knowing that all they're doing
 Is throwing their life down the drain
 People, change

-Voice from Within, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a great poem discussing the "valor" of being in a gang as well as the reality of living this kind of life. People who choose to live a violent life often struggle with the dilemma—is it worth wearing the badge of a romantic illusion knowing that one won't be able to experience trust, other joys in life, and a sense of peace?

Life is Only As Serious as You Take It

When I was little my brother was a big drug dealer. I wasn't one of those little brothers who said "when I grow up I want to be just like my brother," because I knew he was doing wrong, and I had more sense than that. I never wanted to be a gangsta, and I still don't.

I don't think I am through my actions. I'm just a result of my community, my environment plays a big role on me. So I had to do what I had to do to be "accepted" in a sense, in my neighborhood, have the best of clothes, the best ride, etc. But I've come to learn life is only as serious as you take it and there's a lot more to life than clothes and cars.

-Dante, Alameda

From The Beat: You may be one of the first writers who has been honest enough to acknowledge how much of a role wanting to be "accepted" plays in making people do wrong. In the hood, yes, but actually you'll find that in every walk of society, and the heroes are the ones who rise above... you might be learning how to be a hero right now, without even knowing it! We appreciate your candor.



Wondering About My Mistakes

Sitting here staring desperately
 Wondering if God would ever help me
 Escape the tragedy of being in a room the size of me
 Never to expect the world is dying
 No time to waste
 I got moves to make my life is at stake
 My time being taken away
 Nothing I can do, nothing I can say
 I just want to throw my life away
 But that will be a big mistake.

-Kenneth, Alameda

From The Beat: That would be a big mistake to throw your life away. You have things to live for and people that care about you. You don't have time to waste. Don't waste your time in here, you're not going to find whatever it is you're looking for. Make some positive moves and positive things will cross your path.

You Still Got Milk Behind Your Ears

Bet, what's good? Check it... This week has been so messy. Every time you turn your head, one of these girls is talking about ninjas in other units. Man, shhh is crazy. They need to start changing their topic to what they going to do when they get out. I bet you up in other units, them boys — "grown men" — don't always talk about females.

Girls is just so dumb and boy crazy. But what they need to be is either money crazy. They want to fight with other females over boys that's locked up, and they can't do nothing with them but see them at school. Can't even talk to them! But these females quick to say, "That's my future baby daddy." You can't even take care of yourself.

Look at the predicament you in, and you steady trying to make him your baby daddy. And on top of that, you trying to bring a baby in the messed up predicament you in. Or, if they don't use the line, "That's my baby daddy," they use, "I'm his wifey." Shhh like that makes me sit back and laugh at you. All these jailbird-ass ninjas is doing is feeding you jail talk, and you so dumb, you fall right into the trap. Ha ha!

That's all I do is laugh at y'all 'cause, like I say, MMMH — Money Make Me Happy. But I'm out for now, Beat. Always remember, trust no on. Who you think is your friends is really your enemies.

-Queen B, San Francisco

From The Beat: First, we have to correct your impression about the boys. They DO always talk about females. It's not just being locked up that makes them miss the girls in their lives, it's what all teenagers everywhere are focused on. But second, we think you could use a little of your own advice: "They need to start changing their topic to what they going to do when they get out." Even though we agree with you locked-up girls talking about making babies with locked-up boys sounds childish (and irresponsible), what we want to know is what you're going to do when you get out!

Jail

Going to juvie, going to jail
 Neither is fun when you want bail
 Then you're stuck in your cell with nothing to do
 All the food you get is super booboo.
 If you could take back your crime you probably would
 But you know that you can't ever though you really should,
 When you get out, you're back to the streets
 Doing your crime, not reading the Beat.

-Pimp Suit, Alameda

From The Beat: Pimp suit, thank you for sharing this piece, and for telling it like it is. What CAN The Beat do for young people once they are out again?

Brother

Brother where you at?
 Brother why you have to get mad?
 And turn your back
 Brother, look at me now
 Locked up and never going to be out
 Brother, I forgive you all I want
 What you are to do is listen
 Brother, never do what we done
 Again cause you don't want to be
 Spending you life like I spend mine
 In this cell, with no one to tell you they care,
 Where you could never feel the real air.

-B Past, Santa Clara

From The Beat: What a powerful message this poem has. This poem, we hope will touch many lives, hopefully some lives that are not locked up. We wish we can give you a megaphone and a radio microphone so you can broadcast this message to those in need of your wise and strong words.

'Hoods

What's up with The Beat? It's Yung Newt. All this claimin' sets and postin' on blocks is not worth your life. Getting' money and carryin' guns, it's not worth throwing your life away, ending up in someone's jail. So stop the violence. It's not getting nobody nowhere in life but jail or death.

-Yung J. Newt, San Francisco

From The Beat: Of course, we agree with you. But we also have to wonder why someone who realizes that the street life leads to death or incarceration ends up coming here. What do you have to do to stay free?

The Promises Versus The Reality Of Gangs/ Sets/ Hoods

The reality/cold hearted thing about a gang is when you've been cool/raised around kids from the neighborhood and if you snitch or something disloyal to your brothers/homeboys/gang allies, they mess you up real bad and I've seen it happen--and that's just one thing I don't get about it because for example if my closest friend/ homeboy/brother snitched or something like that we would have to smash on him. And he would go all bad. And I don't like that and I don't understand how people can do that to there own homie/ brother. But that's just how is.

-Juan, Solano

From The Beat: It seems like that loyalty is important to the organization of the brothers/homeboys/allies--so much so that it will be reinforced violently. You don't have to do anything that doesn't seem right to you. Trust and listen to yourself. It takes a lot of courage if what you think is not what those around you think.

Proud Of Obama, But...

What's up, Beat? It's ya boy Cold Cash A. Naw, I just playin'. It's Ant Dawg... and guess what... I'm back. I ain't proud of comin' back, but runnin' away from the grouper got me put up in YGC.

But I am proud that Barack Obama was elected the first black president of the United States. I speak for myself and everybody who voted for Barack. It took us by shock when he was elected president about a week ago.

But back to the situation, I ran from the grouper and turned myself in because I thought that it would look better on my case. But man, was I wrong. now my PO wanna send me to a grouper in LA. But it ain't gone do nothin' but make my situation worse. For one, the only contact I'll have with my family is by phone. For two, I gotta lil' girl that'll grow up without no dad in her life, and that ain't good for me or her. And third, even though my dad and his wife is the reason why I'm in the situation that I'm in, but he's still my pops and I'm always have love for him and my step mom.

I told my lawyer to have the court release me on an ankle monitor so I can be extra supervised, 'cause a young boy needs it nowadays, and so I can do this school thing and keep my pee clean and get off this paperwork, so I can do what the hell I wanna do and wild out 'cause Barack's my president. Peace out, Beat.

-Ant Dawg, San Francisco

From The Beat: Even though you don't agree, we still think you made the right decision to turn yourself in (and the wrong decision when you chose to run). Whatever happens (and we hope you get to stay close to home), you acted like a responsible adult when you decided to face the music, and no one can take that away from you. Of course, if you get out of here and "wild out" to celebrate Obama's victory, you not only will be risking your freedom, you also will not be honoring Obama, who has called on all of us to be responsible in our everyday actions, and especially in relation to our children. So celebrate, yes, but do it responsibly!

The Promise Versus The Reality Of Gangs/ Sets/'Hoods

I can't really speak on much 'bout my turf and gang. I'ma keep it real. Joining a gang was more like a family who look out for each other. The surprises I found out was that murder was common. I always have to be strapped and gotta look over my shoulder every time I set foot in the streets.

Being from a 'hood and a gang is real common in San Francisco. Flashin' police car lights, gunshots, gang fights and blocks yellow-taped up. No lies. I'm keepin' it real. It ain't for fun.

Besides being locked up, I keep it sold in the 'hood. But in ain't sweet up in the backstreets. But my mind focused and my head up straight, ready to knock my sentence out.

-Young Rascal, San Francisco

From The Beat: How do you balance — in your own mind — the good the gang does by looking out for each other with the bad that it does by engaging in murder? How much of your own life are you willing to hand over to this system and call it a fair trade for your street activities? A month? A year? A lifetime? If running from the cops, seeing your homies shot, having gang fights with people who look and sound just like you is not "for fun," then what is it for? We don't know what we would do in your same situation, but when we see the results of the gang wars, it makes us cry to see how many of your homies will never live in freedom, if they live at all. What about you?

A Life On Death Row

'S up with The Beat? If I were on death row, I think I would try to become the smartest person in prison, both mentally and physically. If there's a way to keep sane in that type of reality and situation, I think learning to the extent would be the way because it helps time go by.

I would write books about my life and what ended me up in prison. Hopefully, it would change many youth and perspective of the way things are and bring hope to them.

-Kiko, San Francisco

From The Beat: Thank you for trying to put yourself in the shoes of another, and especially of one facing the death penalty. We admire what you've written because most people your age say that they would kill themselves if they were in that position, even though we know they would not. Tookie Williams wrote books from death row that changed many young people's outlooks. But he's not the only one. Way back in California history, there was a man named Caryl Chessman who wrote three books while waiting for his execution, which came in 1960. Life is not over until it's over.

History

What's upbeat? Man, I'm so happy that Barack made president! The reason why I'm happy is because one of us, as in African-Americans, has finally made history. Now, I know for a fat it's not going to be any more racial slurs in the White House. Yeah, I was surprised Barack made president because I thought the people at the polls was going to cheat for McCain.

Yeah, I think this country is fins to change for the better and not the worse. I think we fins to have more money invested into jobs, schools and housing. But yeah, I am happy black people has finally made history. That's it for The Beat. I'm out.

-Queen B, San Francisco

From The Beat: We share your excitement and hope about Obama's election as president. But, of course, he is not the first African-American to make history, only the first to become president. (African-Americans are largely responsible for building the country itself on their backs.) We hope that as people of all colors and races watch this talented young man do his thing, they will begin to see that it doesn't matter what race you are, we can all achieve and be somebody. The newly elected president has given us all what he named his book, 'The Audacity of Hope.'

Change Is Coming

President Barack Obama being elected for 44th president of United States of America has given hope and opportunity for a lot of colored Americans. I never thought a black man will ever become president until Barack Obama became one.

Now I believe there is hope for other colored people rather than white men to run America and change what's going on in this country. There will be changes coming up very soon. In the streets, there were still several problems out there. But now we have a black president, so there will be less problems with that. There are haters out there, but who cares about that shhh.

-Dk, San Francisco

From The Beat: We are much older than you, and we also never thought a black man would become president. We are not only proud of him, we are also proud of our own progress to this point. It's like America is finally growing up! Now that you've seen what's possible in the way of change, does it inspire you to want to change anything about how you live your life? What kind of new hope does Obama's election inspire in you?

Skip's Broadcast: Trading Places

Penal check 1,2,1,2... Skip on deck. What's good with The Beat? I'm in here stressin' for a blessin'. But yea, it's a topic that's afoot, so let me get to it.

If I had to choose who I could be like in someone else's shoes, I would try to attempt to be a Chinese person to see if the stereotypes are true. I don't believe it is, but I want to see if they are all ninjas, eat rice, can't drive and pick noses in public. I never been one to believe in stereotypes, but I've seen some o the stereotypes and have not been sold about it.

I would run for president and make history again. If I would have to be a person on death row, I don't know what I would do.

-Skip, San Francisco

From The Beat: We're making this a Co-Piece Of the Week, Skip, because you are one of the very few who was willing to put yourself, or even try to put yourself, in someone else's shoes, and we admire that. We can assure you that those stereotypes you've heard about are just that — stereotypes. And just because some Chinese fit what you've heard, there are always people who fit the stereotypes that others have about them. (We have all heard the stereotypes about black people, but just because some like watermelon or belong to gangs, those things are still stereotypes.) We have known Chinese who are very smart and very dumb, some very good and some very bad drivers, some very rude and other very polite individuals. In short, "they" are just like the rest of us...

Is It Worth It ?

Why be in a gang?
 Why fight for a set?
 Why hurt your loved ones,
 Your family you will forget,
 They love you dearly
 And want you to see clearly
 Ur life is on their mind
 When things are wrong you play like it's fine
 People shootin', stabbin', killing
 Being in a gang ur givin' up ur life willin'ly
 Fighting over a color or an area
 Throwin' up ur set thinking ur a gangsta
 Is getting locked up for ur set a good sacrifice?
 But the real question is... is it worth your life?

-Lady Chief, Solano

From The Beat: Lady Chief we wish you well out there. You ask some good and important questions here—we suppose everyone decides individually. We think maybe it's hard to value your life and put your best interests first when it seems like it doesn't really matter to anyone else.

*The Beat
 Within*

What They Told Me

"What's up homie I want to get jump in like the other homeboys".

"Hold on there lil' homie you got to earn your stripes. And it ain't all about being on the block. Don't ever trust no man or woman, the only people, the only people you can trust are your close, close homeboys. But there not even that, they're your family. Take care of them like yourself. If they're true they'll do the same. When you locked up they make sure your family eats and are safe, that's a homeboy."

Anyone can pull a trigger. The rivals will come and go. You show weakness like you're scared you will die. If you tell on someone aka a snitch you will die or bad stuff will happen even if you drop out. Don't get in it if you don't want the life style like you know what I mean.

Don't ever disrespect your parents. Especially your mom, that's the only woman you should love. If you hit the pinta your homeboys are there but your mom the only one crying and visiting you. If you don't care and do it to the fullest then do your thing.

Don't hurt the innocent that's not what we do. We might kill our rivals or beat them up. We show our colors, our pride, and loyalty. We're not bad people don't let no one bring you down or say you're a bad person or worth nothing, we're the same as them, but brought up different-most of us don't got family but the homies.

Yea I "gang bang" but who's to judge me? The cops yeah there always goin' to be there to frame you or lock you up. One day you might get life or see the pinta for a long time. That's why you gotta be smart stay on your toes. Get a diploma get off probation be legit. For they can't mess with you. Searching you or your house.

Do your stuff right stay solid, be a hog, people talk their stuff but when it comes down to it who want it. Like the bible says don't fear no one but God. That's what I got to say do what you do if you decide to live for it stay solid instead of fake."

-the next generation, Solano

From The Beat: If a young person needs a "family" and an older person tells them this, it would sound like it makes sense, it might even sound sort of safe because it's organized and it's a set of rules you can follow and understand. The bible also says "thou shall not kill," and it doesn't say except rivals. This makes it sound like it's fine to go to the pinta, and we don't think it's a caring adult (not someone we'd call family) who would ask you to do anything, or advise you to do anything that might lead you to prison, especially to life in prison. No one is "bad" themselves, it is behavior and decisions and the consequences of those things that are bad. When you are young you naturally look to people you respect for guidance. Now you are getting older and have learned more about the world and what is possible for you. You do not need to live your life in prison, or ruin your life and other's through violent actions. Did you take this advice? You definitely remember every word... do you believe it's true? If you did take this advice is there anything about it you now regret, or understand more deeply from your own experience? In other pieces of yours we hear you wonder what else you might have made of your life. Give your self the chance to check out what else you might do, who else you might become. Would you give this advice to someone younger than you that you cared about and knew needed help?

Inquire

In this material world
 Everything is old
 As recycled as this seems
 Is there room to dream?
 How do you know what you know
 Without being taught or told
 Is there such thing as deep
 or is there only lukewarm
 Is there such thing as love?
 I can't decide if I want to be free
 Or if I want to conform
 Will people ever get over it
 Or will we always be hypocrites
 Why do people trust
 And then get hurt when their feelings are crushed?
 Sometimes I wonder why we talk
 And why we live and go places
 And why we are selfish and don't stop
 Why we look in the mirror at worn out faces
 I'm only 16 and I wish I was 10 yrs younger
 Or is that cheating?
 I'm afraid of God.
 Or is it manipulation?

-Lizy, Solano

From The Beat: You ask great questions in this piece, and we think your answer is mostly your title, "inquire." You have to be thinking to wonder these things, and you have to be awake...we all have to drive safely and things like that—for the safety of everyone and yet still there are huge choices with what we can do with our freedom. Some say freedom is in our mind—as you know it's not restricted to that—what will you do with your freedom?

Breaking My Street Addiction

What's up, Beat? Well, I'm sitting here thinking what I'm finna do when I get out, and it's driving me crazy! It's like I sit and ask God why, why me? Why now?

I'm trying to look at this situation as some type of blessing or miracle. I try to tell myself that if I didn't get locked up the night ort day I did, I could be dead, just laying in a ditch somewhere, or so high that I can't even think straight while hella dues is going and running through my shhh! It's like being on the run is not all it's cracked up to be! You always got to worry about yo' safety, clothes, food, health and yo' shelter.

But you see, for me it's my life! The streets are so addicting, it's hard to pull away from. I've been running and getting locked up the last two and half years, a total of 15 times! And the cold part is I'm only 16 years old! I'm wanting to change. I have plans and everything. Just got to put them in action!

So, words of advice, the streets ain't everything! My advice is to go and finish high school, go get a legal job, go to college, actually do something with your life! The streets aren't always gonna be there for you; yo' education will. Believe me, y'all, I know what I'm talking about! You only have one life. Live it to the fullest.

-Ottoma, San Francisco

From The Beat: There are three things which we admire about this piece. First, You start right off by telling us that you're thinking, and thinking is always a good thing, especially when you're thinking about your future. Second, you write that you want to change, and wanting to change is the first step to actually changing. And third, you have plans for your future that don't involve crime and punishment, which means you have goals you can map out how to reach. In other words, you're way ahead of many others your age in your thinking. Yes, the streets can be addictive, but remember that addicts often die of their addictions, or if they don't die, they end up looking old and ugly before their time. Addiction to the streets is no different. It's time for you to give recovery a try. Take the advice you give in that last paragraph seriously. You never know how many more chances you'll get.

She Looks Like Me

Far far away in the distance, in the shade.
 In the dark, far far along the way, present now tomorrow gone.
 Hold the truth
 Thought the day was long.
 Not for you, maybe not for me.
 I see blood, a body lying in the streets, who is she?
 There's this feeling, it's weird, I get closer and closer
 She's been stabbed and shot
 Pretty cocoa skin that shines in the sun
 They turn her around she looks like me,
 Break down and cry – my soul has been set free.

-Shantell, Alameda

From The Beat: We hope that by trapping this nightmare vision between the poetic lines of a piece of paper, you help keep it from coming true! Because we need your soul down here, to live, love, and teach.

Being My Own Person

Today, I'm going to talk about being my own person and making my own decisions. Yesterday, my dad told me he wanted to change my mind. I've already made up my mind, so I argued with him instead.

My dad is encouraging me to go out of state placement for a couple of years. He doesn't think that I will do well, and he thinks that I'm going get my 3rd strike. I know the odds are against me from the beginning, I was dealt a set of cards. I've already lost most of my teen years locked up.

I've made my mind up because I don't want to lose my lady and I want to be there for my son's first day of school. We always know what is best for ourselves. Sometimes, what we want gets in our way and that is when we need advice from an outside source to keep us on track.

-Reaper, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Does your dad truly understand how much you love your girlfriend and your son? Focusing on being a good partner and a parent as goals show that you are maturing and attempting to make commitments as an adult. It's not going to be easy, but we know that in the end, the rewards will be lasting and positive.

Confused

I'm confused right now, don't know which way to go
 Staff gettin' on my nerves, I'm tryin' to keep cool though
 Thinkin' about the hood got my mind on trip, and
 Lookin' at these same walls got my head wanna flip
 Bad mood attitude, dang I don't really care.
 I got so many problems I probably could even share
 Granny sick, potna dead, uncle in the feds
 Pain hurt and envy I don't ever feel dread
 Go to sleep eyes open man I'm ready for whatever
 Going through so much feel committed to the devil
 Missin' momma, missin' daddy, missin' the whole block
 Stress level up so my head 'bout to pop
 In the zone right now I just wanna be away
 Don't care about nothing 'cause my ninja rest in peace
 Trippin' right now ain't nothin' I could do
 But think about lost ones and say I miss you
 Mind so sick all I know is just the bad
 And ask me why my potna is up in Chad (CYA)
 Show no remorse that's how I'm feelin'
 I'm confused right now it's too many hands I'm dealin'
 We all we got

-Lil' Purp, Alameda

From The Beat: You take us on a powerful, upsetting journey through all the feelings and memories that you balance in your mind. When all these thoughts come at you, does it add to your stress? Does writing them down ease that stress? If not, what do you do when you feel like you're "about to pop"?

My Second Family

I grew up around a lot of alcohol, drugs, and violence. Waking up to see my step dad beating my mom. My real dad left me when I was just a baby like 2 or 3. My mom had a lot of boyfriends that she dumped because they were always drunk or high off something beating her up. I was too young to do anything to help but cry for her.

I slowly grew up in this life style also getting beat by my step dad until I reached 15 and finally defended my mom and socked one of my step dads. Soon I started drinking then smoking doing cocaine ecstasy and hanging out with my second family. We all look at each other like second family. Always looking out for each other and making sure we cool.

They're like my second family because they were there times my real family wasn't. I first started hanging out with my 2nd family when I moved to the neighborhood. Drug dealers, gangsters, prostitutes, alcoholics, and every five-minutes the cops raiding somebody's house. This is the neighborhood I grew up in and eventually I started banging.

At first I was just watching, looking at everything that was going on. Times when I would go to school I would get into conflicts with people I didn't know just because of the neighborhood I lived in. so now I had rivals I had to look out for whenever I'm alone on the streets. That's when I met with my second family. They taught me about how the gang life was and how it would affect my life.

So frustrated with family issues and school problems, drugs and alcohol I got jumped in. I've been in for about a year now. I have no second thoughts about getting in. All I do is watch out for my second family.

-Silent One, Solano

From The Beat: We understand why having a second family would seem like a good idea, and that the loyalty must feel good after not having that security with your first family. We also see that you grew up in a hectic environment. It would be great if you could have the loyalty and friendship without the illegal activity. You don't need another issue piled on to your already heavy plate.

Just a Moment

Can we please take a moment to mourn?
 For Pac, Biggie, and Pun,
 'Cause through us they live on,
 Jam Master J, Freaky Ty, and Aliyah,
 Big L, and Left Eye when we die,
 We hope to see you,
 Can we have a moment for children?
 Who got raped and murdered or trapped in this system?
 Who never knew their fathers,
 Never learned to dream.
 They were raised by drug dealers, killers, and crack fiends,
 For single mothers forced to play mom and dad,
 Trying to give their kid stuff they never had,
 For my homies in the pen,
 Hoping rhymes will get them signed,
 So when released they can say good-bye to a life of crime,
 For all the mothers holding their sons,
 In the street, bleedin'
 The sorrow too deep for speakin'
 This is just a moment out of our day-to-day struggle,
 To show the one we really care about,
 We love them

-Reaper, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, what a turn you've taken us in the poem! From the famous stars to the most painful experiences, you've taken us on a tour from heaven back down to earth.

Part One

Purp: Reezy I'm tired of being broke, I'm tryna get some dough.

LaRon: You ain't even gotta tell me 'cause I already know Purp: A, I got a lick for us, is you wit' it? LaRon: If it's gon' cop me them four's then you know I'm a hit it. So what's up, you ready to hit that thang tonight?

LaRon: I need paper, gotta get it, it's only right.

Narrator: So Purp and Laron get all blacked up,

No vest no mask just stay all strapped up.

It's 11 pm on a Friday night, guns cocked back and that drum on tight.

LaRon: A ninja, you sho' this is the right house?

Purp: I seen 'em leave out this morning and I already scooped in out. They got 2 kids that's on vacation. So we gon' run in an' out wit' no hesitation.

LaRon: Come on let's do it.

Purp: In case anything happen I love you my ninja and I shouldn't have to prove it.

Narrator: They jump in a open window on the side of the house, careful not to make noise, as silent as a mouth.

LaRon: Purp where the shhh at that we came to look to.

Purp: I think it's upstairs you know it's all good bro.

Bro we got about 20 stacks already in cash

Purp: But soon as we find this coke we gone be outta here fast

Narrator: They go upstairs and open the door Tune in next week it's a lot more to explore.

This is just a story of what goes on in the streets of where I'm from. Tune in for Part 2 next week. We all we got.

-Lil' Purp

From The Beat: You've combined poetry, action, and playwriting in one piece ... great inventiveness and creativity. Plus you ended on a tense moment, just like a cliffhanger on a tv show! It's good to see that each week you experiment with a new form and a new style. This is how artists get better, by challenging themselves in new ways all the time. Keep it up.

It's Different This Time

What's cracking this be Sleepy from Santa Clara. Well damn I'm back in the hall. I ran from my grou home in Visalia.

Damn I cannot believe I came back. I was hella mad because I have my lady and my son, he is a year old now, and I'm here in the hall.

I been trying to do my programs but I keep failing them. Now I'm going out of the state to a program for 18 months.

I been to the hall 6 times already. I'm really tired of being locked up.

I really want to be out for my son and family. I been doing a lot of thinking and I want to change. But I've been saying that since the first time I came here so I don't know if I will or not. Because that last time I said I was going to change and I ran from Visalia.

I am going to try my best at my next placement. I don't want to be like my brother who is doing life for a murder charge or like my mother who left me and my brothers and sister for crack and went to prison and has another six years for a stabbing. I was born in a county jail.

Well I'm gonna try to do my best and stay true to who I am. Well to all that are in here be good and stay up and don't come back. It's not a fun place to be. Much love and respect.

-Sleepy, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You sound angry about being locked up again. Are you angry at yourself? It sounds like you keep making the same mistakes over and over again. What can you change to get back to your girl and your son? We're pulling for you to make better choices that will benefit you and your loving family.

They Are Just Keeping It Real

I sit in this room lookin' at four walls crying myself to sleep wondering what's wrong with me. People say I'm scared.

I say, "scared of what?" and they say, "I'm scared of my future."

I say, "maybe you are right, I am sixteen years old and in two years I will be eighteen. I spent a lot of years in the system and it seems like I can't get out and it seems like time is going too fast, and I'm really trying to get myself together before it's too late."

People keep telling me that the route I'm going in I'm gon' end up in Santa Rita or Chowchilla.

I be getting mad like how you done tell me where I'm gonna be, but I know everything they tell me is true and they just keeping it real so I respect it, and now I'm doing better and now I'm on level three.

-Unknown, Alameda

From The Beat: It sounds like a couple people cared about you enough to tell you the truth as they saw it! And instead of losing control, you handled it by getting yourself up to Level Three! Congratulations, you learned something about yourself, which is that you rise to the challenge when it's before you!

All by myself

I got a circle that will grip still for me.
I got a circle that will rip that will kill for me
but I argue and fight with my own mother.
Nowadays you can't really trust your own brothers.
That's why you keep you enemies the closest to you
'cause your friends will be the ones to put the toast to you.
That's why you have to change yo' surroundings,
'cause people that can swim, love watchin you drown.
That's why everybody chill with me
but aint nobody gon' pay my bill but me.
That's what you gotta do for help.
But I'm in the zone all by myself,
I'm alone all by myself.
But I don't need nobody else but me, myself and I. And God.

-Lil' Dirt, Alameda

From The Beat: In the end, you've gotta do what's right by you. If you can find friends that are there for you when you need them then that's great, but if your friends leave you hangin', they're not friends. You say your friends would kill for you, but would they stop you from doing something bad for you? Would they encourage you to do what's good for you, instead of what's good for them? Something to think about...

Happy Birthday To Me

Damn! I can't believe I'm still locked up! Today it's my 18th birthday to be in here.

I remember that when I turned 17 last year, all I was thinking about was how I was gonna plan my 18th birthday, how I was gonna have a "fat house party," and all my friends over. I was goin' to have so much alcohol and 'dro, I bet! I was goin' to party 'til the cops showed up at my house! I had this all planned up. But now all that went down the drain.

Now, all I really want is to be home with my family (no alcohol and no drugs), and just have a nice dinner with them...

-Yung Chuy, San Francisco

From The Beat: Well, we both know how that party you planned for your 18th would have turned out once the police broke it up... So, maybe you needed this cold bath to see what's truly important in your life. We can think of no better way of expressing that treasure that is already yours than wanting a simple dinner at home with your family. We hope that happens very, soon — a belated birthday present. Happy Birthday, Chuy!

The promise versus the reality of gangs/sets/hood

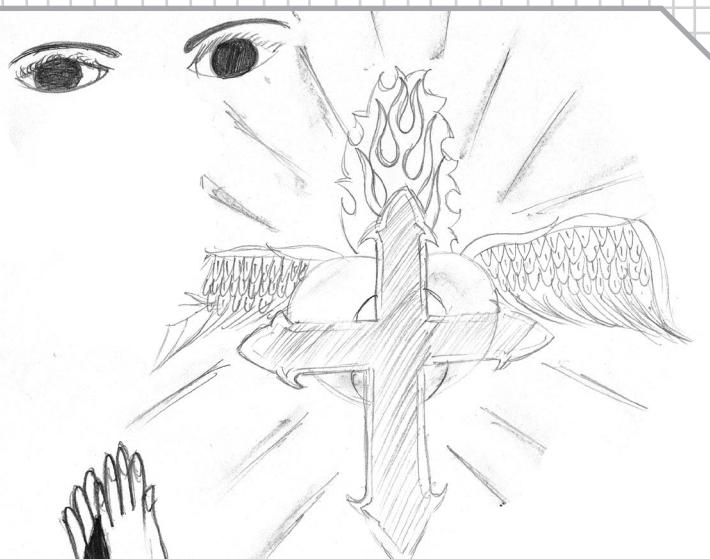
The reality of a gang is that people
Get recruited and think everything
Is going to be all good and you
Won't get in trouble but reality is
That if you join a gang it's good
At first you go to parties you meet
A lot of girls and it looks like
Every thing is all good but then
You have to put in work then that's
When you start getting caught up
Then you start getting chased
Beat up, shot at, then it start
Getting all bad and every where
You go you have to be looking
Over your shoulder all the
Time 'cause when you're a gang
Member your life is on the line

Imagining a different reality
I can imagine being a cop 'cause
I will stop people and give them
Tickets and I will beat up the persons
I will put fake charges like
They did to me and I will like
To be a cop 'cause you won't get
In trouble if you do some stuff
when you are a cop like running
stop signs and red lights

giving thanks
I give thanks to my mom 'cause
She raised me and cause she loves
Me. I give thanks to God 'cause
I am still alive and I give thanks
To my family 'cause they been
There for me in rough times.

-Em, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We think that this piece is not only truthful but beautifully written. The way you've structured your short lines causes your thoughts to tumble into each other in a way that makes us feel like we're breathing hard from the sheer energy of your words. The way you move from describing the reality of gang life into what it might be like to be a cop into your gratitude for your family provides a really interesting stream-of-consciousness—a fancy way of saying writing like you think. Would you call this a poem or prose? Keep on keeping on—you've got our attention.



My Affiliation

What up Beat? Today I'm gonna write about the promise versus the reality of gangs and the hood.

Well, I started banging at a very young age—I don't got no memories of not banging. I didn't really expect the gang to have regulations but when I started to get older and wiser I started to learn the regulations and it was amazing how we conducted ourselves and I started to get deeper in the gang. I was getting a lot of knowledge from all the older homeboys. Then I was ready to go and join my hood because I knew what I was getting myself into.

I was not the first one in my family to bang—there's generations of my family being homeboys and homegirls. I was raised into gangbangbang so I really did not have a choice I was just brought up into it, but something I did not expect is that homeboys would fight and kill other homeboys. It was crazy when my older homeboy got killed by the same gang—after that my trust level went down for a lot of hoods except my hood and hoods that I'm close to.

I was attracted to banging because of the violence and the females but now it is different I'm not in it for the females and the fame I'm in it for what it stands for and now there ain't no turning back and I'm dedicating my life to my hood. Much love to all.

-Lucky, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You say you're in it for the lifestyle represents—can you tell us what that is? Is it worth a never-ending cycle of violence that claims your friends and family? Is it worth being locked up for? How did you feel when your homeboy got killed—did it make you question the worth of the cause you'd been fighting for? It must be hard to question something that's always been a part of your life, even a part of your family, but we here at the Beat want to encourage you to believe that you have options, that you're not stuck in a life of gangbangbang if you don't want to be.

Back In The Old Days

When I was about five, my mom told me that she took me to the fair and when we walked past a band playing some music, I had sat there and was dancing to the music.

My mom told me that I used to be on a doggy line. My mom told me that I was fast and I used to like to play baseball and I like to swim a lot, too.

I wish I can go back into the past and do all the things I used to do. I wish everything will go back. I wish life was not like this—no halls, no jail, nothing.

- Yogi, Marin

From The Beat: You have some wonderful memories. When your mom tells you stories about you when you were young, can you remember back when it actually happened? Have your teenage years been harder for you? How can you make your life the way you want it when you're home again?

Time To Think

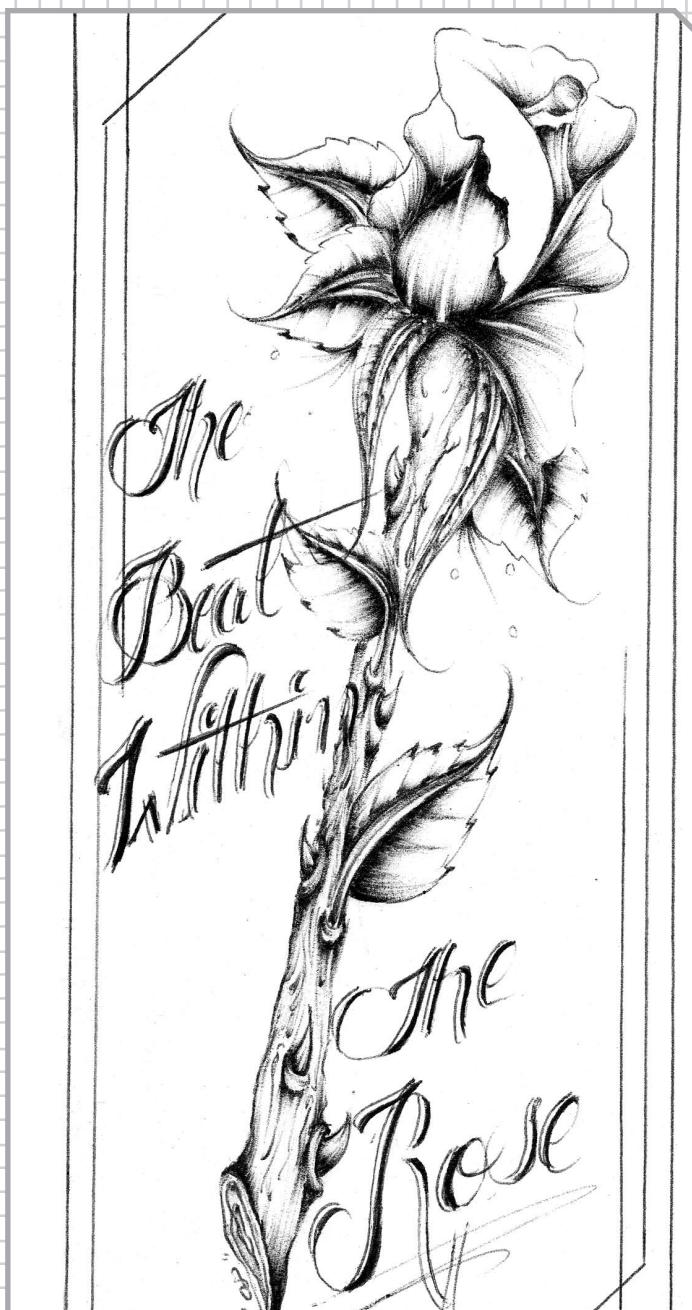
Yeah, this the Beat man. I'm locked up right now, but I'ma be home in no time. Me and both of my brothers locked up. But it's cool. This just give us time to sit down and think hard about life.

Life is real. You can be here one day and gone the next. Some people come back and forth to the halls. When I get out, I'm not tryna come back. I got a lot to life for. But I did the crime, so I'm gone do the time. For the people that can't do the time, don't do crimes.

We be back together one day. Keep yo' head up and stay focused.

-B.Wizz, San Francisco

From The Beat: It sounds like you're using the time you have to give to this cold system to think about a future that does not include handing away your freedom. So, what are you thinking about for staying out of here?



Doing Nothing

Waking up today,
 feeling I should stay in bed,
 when my thoughts are cut short by the ring of the telly.
 It's my fat old boss from the deli
 talking about how his money's coming up short,
 something about the judge wanting to see me in court.
 Just then my pops busts in the door, acting hard,
 whining about the brew in the garage.
 Then my baby's mama calls me up, yelling at me
 about some girl I got at three years back.
 Feels like I had enough, so I'm sitting in my driveway
 buzzin',
 watching the day just go on by. And I'm still doing
 nothing.

-Oscar, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Wow, terrific poem. This is what the poets call a prose poem, with internal rhyme. But don't worry, for now, about fancy labels. Just keep writing. Fine work.

Home

What is up? Well today I just wanted to let y'all know how this camp life is treating me. Well first of all tomorrow me and some of the homies and other people gonna be eating at this lil' barbecue.

Also for thanksgiving I got to go home from Wednesday through Sunday, so you know yo' boy is feelin' great. I'm gonna be with my family, celebrating and hopefully with my lady. And if I'm not with her that day I'll be with her on the other days. I'm also gonna be with my boys, posted, waiting for them bootsy curfew calls at my house while me and my lady are with each other...

-Rafael

From The Beat: We hope your thanksgiving went as well as you planned - and you stayed out of trouble. Soon you will have every single day free, will you be able to keep those positive spirits up when freedom just becomes part of your daily life?

Surrounded By Pain And Frustration

Man, sittin' in this old punk ass unit since it's been opened and it's me and anotha cat that's been here the longest. But what really makes me hella mad is these cats love to speak about new ninjas that they don't know nothing about but when you get out and see the man it's all goodie good everything all cool but it's really not, 'cause most definitely if and when I got a problem I'm gon' knock it down no hesitation, fast.

- Lil' Solid

From The Beat: We cut some of this because it was too full of insults to print. We hope you are able to make some real friends to have support both on the inside and the outside.

Not True

I believed that I would have fun, and live a long free-life. Bullshhh! I was wrong. The first year I started banging I came to the hall twice! Got arrested like 12 times.

It just went downhill from there. I got more and more involved with my new family and I met new people that knew everything about me. Task force became a nightmare to me, they would always see me and they would pull me over and question me just to mess with me. My "homies" got caught up.

-Lil' Bob

From The Beat: What would it take to still have a chance to live a long free life? You're young, even if you're looking at some time you still have a chance. What happens in your life depends on what you decide and commit yourself to. You don't sound happy with the life you lived—let it go. Start over.

What's up Beat?

Man, I'm tired of the hall. I've been here for, like, almost two months, man. I think I'm ready to go now. Even though this is my third time I'm already used to it. That's not even cool, the way the system has us all locked up in this little crazy place.

Wow, they say it's not jail but who can't tell the system won't fail you behind four walls. Would you start to stress doing a big workout to gain respect? The system is bad and we get in the system because of the bad choices we make such as robbing people, jumping people, and what everybody calls hitting licks which means to break into someone's house, and steal all of the goods just to get money for themselves.

-David

From The Beat: It's great you are able to spread the blame around. There may be problems with the system, but you are right about having choices to make.

The New President

I hope Barack Obama could really change things for us in the hood get us better schooling and better jobs and better deals for the jail system. I'm glad there is finally a black president in the white house it's time for change. I hope he don't get killed we finally made good history. God Bless America

-Young Boobie

From The Beat: He's getting his whole cabinet and advisors set up so he can hit the ground running in January. There's a lot for him to do, for sure—with our help.

Responses To These Topics

1) Running

Running away from the law ain't easy. But when you run it ain't as easy as just being here doing your time. Running away from trouble. And keep faith around for me and my family.

2) Which is easier? Life on the outs or in here?

Which is easier? Both sides, 'cause ain't no telling what's good for you or going to happen on either end 'cause it might be a death wish on the out and a saver here. But, you don't know. Living life, that's what's easy, really.

3) Swallowing your pride

Pride to overcome and have a goal for sorting things like going to college and making out of Oakland, you know.

4) The Election

Obama, not because he's black. But, 'cause half the stuff he says makes me feel better about getting a job or surviving in this world. 'Cause Obama has a future for us black people.

-Marquill

From The Beat: You wrote this in the hour before Obama was officially elected, so you might be feeling even better now. It's great that Obama is helping you see a future for black people! Maybe he'll help us create real choices, between good options, for everyone. He's asking us all for our help, though. We're up for it. Are you?

RIP Carl

I can't wait till I come home I can be home with my family. I can't wait to live my life the way I want to live it. I can't wait when the day come to see my brother again. I can't wait to the time when everybody can be happy. I can't wait to get out of here and stay strong.

-M

From The Beat: Start now, right where you are. Start being the person you want to be, working toward your goals.

Get This Done

I know what I need to do to get this done
When I get released I'm a walk out proud cause I've completed and don't run,
Then wake up the next day with a smile on my face 'cause I've won
And stay in the house with female and have fun
I'm gonna make sure I stay away from suckas to let 'em know that I'm older,
And if they tried to talk to me I'll give 'em a cold shoulder.

-Jbabu

From The Beat: Good rhymes here, and good plan too - rise above the petty fights and focus on your future successes and goals. What have you learned about yourself by learning how to walk away from trouble?

It's Hard to Pass the Program

Hey what's up Beat? This yo' boy Nano coming out of Camp Sweeney. Well today I wanna talk about my life. Well I been at camp for four months, and I'm tired of this shhh.

I got court on Wednesday but I'm not going to get out, because I got to do 7 months, and now I got three months to go! All I got to say about camp is that it's hard to pass the program. They got too many rules and staff be doing hella shhh. The best thing you got to do is stay away from staff so you can go home!

And don't worry 'bout what the next ninja do, worry 'bout yourself. Just to let you know some of these ninjas are fake. Well I got to go to all my ninjas in the block be safe and take care. To my family, keep your head up. I'll be out soon.

Camp life is a good life compared to bein' in the hall. Camp life is good to me 'cause I'm not surrounded by white walls

I been here since June and it is easy not to survive I seen people come in go like runnin' with they problems would help save lives.

-Nano

From The Beat: We like the way you switched up from prose to poetry. It seems like you are doing well in your programs and staying out of trouble, even though it's hard. What do you do to keep yourself in check?

I Choose the Game

What's up The Beat?

Still in here stressing that they having picked me up to go to camp, man.

Still thinking about the hood, man. Miss kicking with my crew, man, hope they staying safe keeping it solid out there.

When I get out for my first visit I'm gonna go kick it with them like when I was out there doing my thang in the hood, but still thinking of my moms 'cause she at home stressing over me, 'cause I used to be a good boy, but momma those days are gone...

I'm always sorry for myself for making my moms sad and that she always stressing over me... and that she knows I'm a gang member 'cause she raise this boy better than that but momma... I ain't leaving the gang life. I choose the game mom's and I'm sorry but I don't want to lie to you no more...

-B

From The Beat: What you do with your life is up to you, whatever you choose. But before you go too far down this road to turn back, you better think long and hard about what you're getting yourself into. Are you choosing it because it's what's there, easy, right in front of you? If you could do absolutely anything in this world, would it be the gang life, or would it be something else?

Barack Obama

Some people say that Obama gone get knocked down! Why must people hate?

I would love to see Barack Obama change the US. Help the schools that are in need and give schools their sports programs back! I trust and believe Obama can make change but not overnight. It's going to take some time.

-Brandon

From The Beat: You're right - Obama has big plans to make a lot of positive changes, but these changes will take time. One person can't fix the country overnight. We all have to do our part to support his changes, and advocate for our communities.

Gangsta

I'm chillin' in the halls thinkin' about them days bangin' on the streets never goin' change look into my eyes see my ways you can take me out the hood but I'm a still stay the same thuggin' in this thang but who can I trust Gangsta is there a heaven for us My jaina but she's nowhere to be found 'cause she rep her town now days it can happen on or off probation I only shed tears when there's rain fallin' out the sky because I gotta keep strong so no one can see me cry Old school cholo I'm a walkin' target so any day I could end up dead.

- Lil' S

From The Beat: Yes, you would still be you, outside of the hood, but that doesn't mean you can't change. It's good to know you are still feeling, and crying, even if you hide it in the rain.

One Life

This ya boy Slick, formally known as Purp. I'm back up in here stressing man. I was up in ROP and I did it movin' due to some shady stuff that goes on up there.

Now they can't think of anything to do with me. So my PO said the court is talking about sending me to CYA for two and a half years. This is a big wake up call for me. I'm done with all the hot shhh. I've realized that I only got one life to live, and it doesn't make no sense to spend it locked up. I'll be 18 in two months and I need to get myself together. I need to be back with my originals. I'm gonna get out and get my grown man on and keep it legit. Still gettin' active tho.

So, on some real shhh, don't take no chances with the system y'all, for real. This is for all you newcomers who still got a chance. This is not the business, coming in and out all the time. You need to be cool, because your life is very precious and isn't worth losing because of dumb choices. Take this advice, all y'all ninjas maybe. Been here sixteen times and it's getting old, man.

Get back in those streets so you can protect your family and make that money. The legit way bra. You gotta keep it solid for your family, but most importantly, yourself. These are some of the best years of your life and it's not worth spendin' them in jail. Get out and eat some steak and shrimp, forget all this county food. Ha ha. For real, though, take advantage of your life man, 'cause you only got one life to live. Enjoy it.

- Slick

From The Beat: Well, you said it all, Slick! Thanks! We hope from this point forward your actions will now speak loud and clear.

320 Days

Me, I'm just 'bout to drop a couple lineas in this libro. So check this out...

I've been locked up for three-hundred-and-twenty days but it's nada.

I went to court and now I got to go Ukiah, but it's cool

I only got to do fifty-two days and I get out when I'm eighteen.

I ain't trippin' off it but when I get out I'm a be with my Lady..

- Lil' S

From The Beat: What are your ideas for how to stay out once you are eighteen?

Thoughts

Man, it's Lil Solid and to keep it solid, these streets nowadays. It ain't cool out there 'cause these j-cats out here really tryin' to grow the one thing they was never born with and that's bein' solid and a heart. So they go outside and start putting that act on like they the hardest out, but really softer than wet cotton candy. I only think these cats get that way because them real goons either tucked out the way or stuck somewhere dealin' with the Feds in jail 'cause most of these so called solid dudes been snitchin' and they need to go back to the porch for the last ten years 'cause they scared that's why I jus' hope these judges really go with what they thinkin' and let me out.

-Lil' Solid

From The Beat: "Softer than wet cotton candy" is a great description. How about next time some examples of being "solid"? Then again, you are not helping matters at all by talking like you invented this lifestyle. Time to focus on your needs, and get busy living a life free of the criminal system. It is possible, but you have to want it, and as long as you want to live the street life, your freedom will always be a tease, meaning, it won't last long.

Missing You

What's up, Beat? This yo' boy Manie writing from JJC. I got eight weeks left and I already did six months.

I miss a lot of my loved ones mainly my mother and brother. I talked to my brother on the phone and we had a cool little conversation. He told me that he and my other brother staying in their apartment at the moment and next time I call he going to give me the address so I can write him 'till the day I get out. I talk to my mom a lot and then I think about my sisters and female friends a lot and they write me all the time. I also talk to them on the phone whenever I get my phone calls. I miss them a lot and I know they feel the same.

-Manie

From The Beat: Manie, it is wonderful that you are so close with your family and have such good friends. They will be a strength for you when you get out and help you stay out! What is your plan to staying free?

The day I came here.

I've been in jail more than a dozen times. I just want to go home and stay at home. I miss my little brother a lot. I miss my mom too.

- Marcel

From The Beat: We, too, hope you get to go home soon and stay home.

Just A Little Rap

What's up Beat?
This is just a lil' somethin' that I like to say all the violence in the hood they playin' with AK's ninjas tryin' to get dough off these broke females... sellin' all kind drugs for this low retail. It is kind of hard when you know you hecka broke an' all you wanna do is get girls an' smoke. I'm so tired of the hall I'm ready to knock a ninja down. Everybody wanna be hard. Think they got bars but when we come through they shottin' like stars! Well that's all for now, Beat.

- Yung Davv

From The Beat: Sorry we had to take out a bit that wasn't fit to print. You've summed up the cycle really well: you are tired of the hall so you want to knock a ninja down, which wouldn't help you get out of the hall! It IS hard when you are broke and when you get into such a cycle. What can you do to get out of it?

Back In The Hall

What's up beat!! This yo homie, I am only Chucho from the town you know. Well my story today is hella bootsy man. I am back in the hall 'cause I ran from camp.

I know I said I wasn't going to run but shhh happened so I left. I didn't want to but I had to, to do what I had to do.

Well them three weeks I was out were the shhh for me! I was kicking it with homies, getting drunk an high all day every day.

Well I turn myself in 'cause I wanted to finish my time the right way. I want to get this over. That's why they sending me back. This time I'm gonna get my passes on weekends and hit the weights. LOL. Well see y'all later...

-Chucho

From The Beat: Sounds like you don't regret running. Just keep in mind that the more you run, the more time you'll end up spending locked up. Stick to your plan this time - finish your time, and once you get out, stay out.

Story of Violence

All my life I been a violent boy playing with them violent toys never been a mark and the money always been my choice. Respecting game my family want me to have a change in me. I never once blamed my mother for what I do in the community. My name is Lil' D my actions be so clear to see. I'm violent oh so violent when I hit the streets. I'm laughing at these people in the hall that want to black-male me. I'm thinking in my cell every night before I go to sleep, where would I be if I didn't have a caring family. My friends be so blind to see. Our ways is not meant to be. What would a guy like you and me do for money. Anything. Anything. We all say the same thing. But really I'm a be my own man and have my own dreams. The violence gotta stop in my life and the community. It's your opportunity and my opportunity, getting on you knees and praying to God is where you should be. That's the end Beat, knowin' don't you respect Lil' D?

-Lil' D

From The Beat: This is a great attitude, D: be your own man, with your own dreams. It's great you have a caring family to give you strength and that you want to share that strength with your community. We hope this strength can help you stop the violence.

The Beat Within 13.47

Alameda Unit 10

(edited by Peggy peg.simmons@yahoo.com)

Cry Tears

Bustin' down everyday 'cause that's all I could do everynight before I go to sleep I think of you forever in my heart an' that ain't no lie why God take you away I don't know why since March 25, bro it ain't been the same Flea an' Chino gone

- Lil' S

From The Beat: Gone because of the gun? Gone because of poor choices? You tell us. Sounds to us like, regardless you are going to live a life on the edge. What is it about this lifestyle that you sacrifice and hurt those that care for you?

These Walls

This yo' boy Damar and I'm here in juvenile hall and I'm telling you that the walls are closing in on me. This ain't coo' and I want to go home.

I get three meals a day and extra treats which don't do nothing for me. I work out and go to school just like on the outside. What's wrong wit' me! I wouldn't ever think I would be in here. You should have seen my mom's face, it was scary. I've been here for 3 weeks, that so long.

I miss my baby Danielle and I want to spend my time wit' her.

Why is the walls closing in on me so fast? The room is spinning and the floor is shaking. It's gon' be so much different when I get out of here. I'm gonna change my life around and never come back.

-Damar

From The Beat: Sounds like a good plan - we wish you the best of luck, and know you have it in you to make that change.

When I Get Out

Well I should be getting out soon, so I hope I don't mess up to get sent back. Well when I get out of here and get sent to camp I hope I don't run, I hope I don't get in any trouble up there. I kind of don't want to stay at camp but I don't want to mess up and run and then get sent to another placement.

-Michael

From The Beat: You write about running as if you don't have total control over it, hoping it doesn't happen. The truth is that it's 100% your call whether or not you run. Maybe try thinking up something you can do every time you want to run. Like, if you feel like running, write about it, or find something you can read that calms you down, brings you back to your long term plan.

Colors

"Oh non ono no no no"

That's my mom worrying about me. I forgot to hide my marks. I have two magic talents, and only one in a thousand has one. I think I'm the only one to have had too.

I said "It's OK mom, sit down, stop pacing. Everyone that saw them thought they were fake." I have two marks, one black and one grey. The magical powers I gained from the marks are teleporting and shockwave. Mom said, well you're old enough to have to deal with your own problems" I nodded.

"OK, but if I have to deal with my own problems, I'm going to use the powers. Don't worry, I'm not my father."

My father was a bank robber. , We still have at least 4.5 million gold coins. Yeah we use gold as money now. It's the 26th century and four dimensions have fused together: The demon world, the magic world, the wild word, and the human world.

"Do what you will, but you are no longer a part of this household. Now go pack and take at least a million gold. " My mom never did count her gold. I've got at least two million at a hide out. It's been there for two years since I was 15. I had been planning to leave anyway, my bags were already packed. I have one duffle bag full of clothes and another full of weapons, Mostly short bladed weapons like knives and daggers and two short swords a little over two feet long

-Kyle

From The Beat: Kyle, this might be your best fiction yet. You're weaving together the information about who your character is with the action of him talking to his mother. It keeps the plot moving forward even while you are explaining background, like a professional novelist would do. Or filmmaker. Keep it up, we're ready for Chapter 2!

The Squad (Gang)

The squad is all family they ride they have fun only when the funk comes then they pull out guns. They got goons they got generals and militants-- get hit life's over why? because they riding for fam...

-Lil Tone

From The Beat: If this squad is family, why would they put each other in danger? Family is supposed to support your growth, enjoy life with you, love you even when you fail and be trusted to have your best interest in mind. Sorry we can't print RIPS.

As the Seasons Change?

What's good, Beat?

Well I'm writing about the season changing because as the seasons change people's feelings do too. Seasons bring back memories about the past because with every coming season there's a memory for that season.

To me, winter is the best because it rains, and, to me, when it rains your soul sleeps better at night without tossin' and turnin'. But on the other hand, to me, when it's winter, the lost souls roam without no specific destination.

-From Kid B

From The Beat: Kid, this is a nice piece of writing. Especially the part, "when it rains your soul sleeps better." Thanks for sharing your thoughts on rain and winter!

Trial

What's good with the Beat? I really don't know what to write about today so I'm just go write about anything. I go to court tomorrow, for my trial date.

If everything goes according to plan this will be the last time hearing from me. I really don't know what to except when I go to court I just hope my money that I've been paying for my lawyer and all of this time I been spending locked up. I been talking to my girl and I'm really looking forward to spending time with her.

-Baby

From The Beat: We're glad your girl's been supporting you. By now you've been to court and have begun the next chapter of your life. Make good choices.

Oakland Violence

People die every day. Oakland is the hottest city smoking right now. Ninjas killin' when ever how ever. The streets aren't nice.

From The Beat: B, thanks for writing this! We would love to know your ideas about why there are so many people dying and what you think might be done to change it

Gang

To be in a gang or set you want to feel safe and have someone you think care about you! You don't need a gang or set to move forward in life. All you need is "God" and a good education and you can go anywhere you set yo mind to.

I'm in a gang but its nothing to glorify or brag about. I hate that people think that just because they in a gang they untouchable, that shhh don't mean nothing!

-Brandon

From The Beat: You write that you don't need to be in a gang, and that it's nothing to brag about, which is something we see a lot. So what attracted you to the gang life? What's the appeal? How will you move on from this?

It's Not What I Thought It Was

When I was growing up I used to see older kids in gangs hanging out in a big group and wanted to be like them. Now that I'm in a gang it's different. I thought it was fun exciting and all that stuff. But it's not. It's the same as doing stuff that I would normally do.

We do stuff like hanging out hecka deep going to parties, drinking, smoking and stuff like that. After a while it gets boring though, we do the same stuff every day and I thought it was going to be fun every day.

-Bace the Great B

From The Beat: Does it make you wonder what other things you could be doing with your time? Have you ever played a sport, or taken a video and edited it into a cool little movie, or been to a foreign country? It sounds like you are looking for adventure, but just choosing the wrong one.

Tired and I Wish It Would Stop

I'm tired of runnin'
I'm tired of gunnin'
I just wish it would stop
but not by the cops
on our own will
besides to kill
I'm tired of runnin'
I'm tired of gunnin'
Bullets flyin'
families cryin'
youngstas out here have no soul
youngstas outside have no goal
I wish it would stop
But not by the cops.

-Ray Ray

From the Beat: Well said, Ray Ray! "By our own will." If youngstas had no soul, though, you wouldn't be so tired. Good luck, you are stronger than you think.

Fly As A Plane

My attire is plain
But I am fly as a plane
I will fire the flame
And expire ya fame
I stay dry in the rain
Who am I, my name you don't know?
Ninja ask your girl.

-Crid

From The Beat: Good rhymes, step up and make sure your subject matter is worthy of your talent. Street braggadocio is fun to write, but how deep can it go?

Introduction

What's up, Beat Within? I'm an inmate in Juvenile Hall and I want to show some of my personalities with you all.

I'm a young Black man from Oakland and I did some stupid things in life. But, I'm not supposed to be perfect. I hope I can improve in the mistakes I made so next time I will not get caught and come back here with these ancient ninjas.

Hope I make it to that Beat Within Book. Never seen my writing inside.

-Darrell

From The Beat: You made it in the paper, Darrell! You are right: no one is a supposed to be perfect and all we can do is try to learn from our mistakes. But, is it about not being caught again, or not doing the thing in the first place?

To The Hills

I don't know about getting out of my "gang" but if I was to become wealthy I'll move my family out the hood and to the hills.

-Fat Boy

From The Beat: If you wait until you're "wealthy" it might be too late for you or your family. You need out now. Your family needs you alive and living with them, loving them, providing for them, teaching them...

President Change

A president change is a good change because the republicans only believe in helping the rich and they forget about the people who struggle in the world outside of being rich. They send people to war and most of the time they don't care about people who have a hard time living, and they make it hard by passing laws like trailing minors and adults because we rob, sell drugs and do what ever it takes to live.

Don't get me wrong I know you know deep down it's a bad thing to do but any president is better than Bush and I was aiming for Barack when I first heard he was running. That's all it gotta say deuces (peace).

-Lil' Bg

From The Beat: Hopefully Obama will put some things in motion to really make big changes, but the truth is, he can't fix all the problems out there alone. He needs people to support him - people like you. If you know something is wrong, don't do it. If you see something you can do to help, do it! Help Obama fix all the problems going on in our communities.

Living Life in a Room

This your boy Unknown. Today man is crazy especially wit' the people that's locked up. Damn I'm stressed out right now 'cause I'm stuck between these walls. I'm just layin' in bed thinking and stressed out.

Every day I wonder what's wrong with us youngsters these days. Man what I think it's because the people, hood, sets, gangs, clicks, peer pressure, and objects around us.

Like me, man, I'm driving stolen cars before I got in here. Damn I didn't know what I was thinking at times. But I'm gonna serve my months and just get straight and help from these staffs in here so when I get out I can make a big positive change.

So everybody that's reading this, listen to the people who are trying to help. Make a change for the best.

-Unknown

From The Beat: The environment we live in has a lot to do with how we grow up and who we become, but that doesn't mean it has to have a hold on us for the rest of our lives. Using the help you have around you is one of the best things you can do to break away from the hold your community has on you.

Why Again?

Twenty-two boys
Five minute in a shower
No money, only blue and tan
Everyday feeling less than a man
Dreams turning into nightmares
Picture all my families' faces.

Book turns my mind into golden story
Months in JJC, opening my eye to a world some don't see.

-Gone Bad Reese

From The Beat: Thanks for your thoughts Reese, this is a good start to a great poem. Next time, instead of trying to write as many pieces as you can, try focusing in on one so you can really get it all out.

Countin' my Blessings

Sittin' here every day thinking if I'm ever going to get out.

Trying hard not to let my fear get the best of me.
Thinking how I let my anger get the best of me.
Trying not to explode, thinking I will never get out of there.

Saying to myself, my blessings are always undisguised
And what I really think is a blessing really is not and what I think is not a blessing, it really is a blessing.

That's why they say always count your blessings because they're always in disguise and you never know when one is coming your way.

'Cause I always seem to think I need blessings when I go to jail.

-LadyShady

From The Beat: What do you think some of the blessings of jail might be? Not just in the short term, but in the long term... do you think having some time away from the drama out there might give you what you need to prepare for freedom?

Fell in Love With Crime

My hood is full of hate
Always patrollin' tryin' to bring up the crime rate
We patrol like it's a chore
Don't stop 'till someone is layin' on the floor
Been doin' this for as long as I remember
It seems as if I can't control my temper
Hatred develops when you're a child
Now look at me runnin' wild
I fell in love wit' crime
Out on the block just tryin' to get mines
Paper is the answer to everything
Hittin' two/elevens anyway with the gang
My hand always behind the chamber
In the game as if I was a gamer
Now I'm in my cell thinkin' 'bout my past
'Cause what's in front of me I don't know if it will last.
Man if this is what you're about
Then you will always be thinkin' about getting out.

-Big Bra

From The Beat: The opposite of hatred is love... right? So what, and who, do you truly love in this world. One thing that's clear from this poem is that you love rhyming. You write with style and skill, maybe that's how you could earn your paper.

An Appreciation For My Girl

We have been together since 1-16-07

I love her so much and we've been through so many things.

I wanna marry her, wouldn't trade her for anything. The night we met we was both hella shy"

I was thinking in my mind "would she like to be with this kind of vato."

Always hanging with my hood , and sippin' on forties with his homies.

I was always out on the streets

She telling me to stop

I didn't want to listen so I got caught up

Now I'm in Camp Sweeney, hella mad.

I see her every weekend now so it's good.

Ana I'm goin' love you forever.

-Knuckle

From The Beat: You have a girl standing by you even though you are away from her. This is a terrific thing - it also sounds as if she wants you to stay safe - which means switching up parts of your lifestyle. Are you ready for that, or are you too good for love?

I Got To Stop

I'm still here in Camp Sweeney doing this time lie a man. I already completed four months in here, and I get my home passes from Friday through Sunday, and I just e chillin' in my varrio with my familia and I'm just happy cause of that. I stay hitting parties up and just get on one. But I got to stop doing that cause familia comes first and that's my goal, to stop drinking for my madrecita and jefecito.

Also I be showing my little brothers and sister a bad example and have to stop so that they can do better. I don't want the to be fuckups like me. The reason I started being a screw-up is because my ninjas used to get locked up and I used to get mad and my then others would die and I would get mad and sad and I'll just go to the point where I'll say fuck the world, but now that I'm in jail, I'm bounce back up, watch for my jefecita and jefecito.

-Kash Money

From The Beat: What kind of example do you want to show? What sort of lessons would you like to pass down to them? Because whatever good life that you think they deserve—do it for yourself too, because you ALSO deserve a good life.

As Always

As always you tend to push me away As always you tend to stay at bay
As always you seem to hurt me.
As always you never let me be. As always you don't care
As always you don't share
As always you go and do what you please
As always you never seem to think about me
As always why
As always you say goodbye! As always you do these things to me
Sometimes I wonder why you let them be, so what I shall say
Mom as always as always

-Karra Bear

From The Beat: There's a pretty intense and deep story behind this poem, isn't there? We hope you'll write a little more about it?

Don't Trip

If you lost your potna
Bra don't trip
If you lost your daddy or your mother,
Bra don't trip
If you 'about to do time
Bra don't trip
If you just took nine
Bra don't trip
If you pops caught a fed case
Bra don't trip
If you was on that paper chase
Bra don't trip
If you miss yo ' ninja
Bra don't trip
If you had six figures
Bra don't trip
If these ninjas hatin' on you
Bra don't trip
If yo' family waitin' on you
Bra don't trip

-Young Purp

From The Beat: We can see how you're comforting both yourself and anyone who has struggled - so next time someone gets you down, we'll take your own words and send the back to you: "Bra don't trip."

Two Things

I'm gonna touch down on two topics.

The first is the things I do on the streets to get me in jail. Before I hit 10 my cousin always told me what's gonna happen if I got caught up in shhh. But the problem with me is I just don't listen. I should of, but it ain't too late.

The second thing is the historic election. Even though Obama is president it ain't changed nothing. He still gotta attend to other needs that they think is important before they help us.

I don't worry 'bout none of that, I'm just get my money make me a zip and get a girl. Then I'm gonna open up my business, I might run for president and go to the hood and help my peoples. That's what a real ninja would do. I'm finna cut and keep livin' that solid life.

-Aj

From The Beat: OK, Aj, this is a good future, the one you are picturing right now. Of course the big question is how do you intend to get your money. Do you plan to go legit? If so, where do you plan to work? And if you are hoping to go back to the streets - (and we hope not) - doesn't that almost mean you are sending yourself back to jail?

Quotes

"The Place where you find yourself today is a direct result of the choices you made yesterday...If you want to change your tomorrow, you have to change your choices today!"

"Whether you think you can or You think you can't... Either way, in most cases, you are correct!"

-Young Jesus

From The Beat: How do these quotes apply to how you think of your life? We agree it does matter what you think...people say what you pay attention to grows...You can always develop yourself and engage your mind wherever you are.

Good Vs. Bad

1. The Bad Me

My head still in the streets Still writing these Beats
I'm tryin' to get fast money and rob. Forget a job.
Get a lick hit it real quick flood the block with a nine
pack and some bo' rick
Stacks coming fast I'm movin' so fast
Nothing moving sowin' money on the block, then I got to go
Chain 's bling the ring bling
All the diamonds they shin' like the sun
After all that I'm in jail
Money at the house I'm gone bail
My dough getting low now I got to rob
I'm 25 years old and I got caught, man it's a rap. 25 years
I got to do over some crap.

2. The Good Me

Got my own business
I ain't got to worry about no witness. Get the money the
right way
Every day is a bright day
Get these millions
Stack up to billions buy me some more business don't
got to worry about jail.
So get rich the right way.

-TCeezy

From The Beat: Seems to us that this isn't so much about the good you vs. the bad you but the happy you vs. the miserable you. If you kept up the route of committing crimes, odds are you'd get caught, or hurt, and you'd end up losing the joy of life. But if you did the "good" thing, wouldn't you also be happy? Safe? Surrounded by loved ones? Raising your children well?

Over With

This shhh is finally over with. No more sleeping in this small ass bed. No more eatin' this nasty ass food. No more listenin' to the system tellin' me what to do.

No more LME, and playing basketball on this small ass court. No more facing the judge, no more ten minute phone calls, no more seeing my parents through a glass window. All of this shhh is over with. My court case is finally over with. After being here so long and I'm about to finally go home. I'm about to be with my family and get away from my enemies.

This is my last time seeing the hall trying to do good for a change. No more running from the police. Be a good daddy and take care of my family. All the thug life is over with. All the violence fighting selling drugs robbing people etc. I'm starting a new life, going to college, taking care of my kid get a good job, go to church.

-Charles

From The Beat: These are strong confident words - and saying/writing them is a first step towards change. But now you need to act on them, which means you need a plan. Tell us your plan Charles, and break it down, step by step. We want to hear that you intend to succeed for real.

I Did It Myself

I'm back and I'm mad but it ain't shhh I can do
And these people don't even know half of what I been through.

I was livin' my life as best as I could
And takin' care of my son like only I would
I'm so stressed right now 'cause me and my son are so far apart
And that's what hurts me the most all the way down to the heart

This is my sixth time in jail and it's always the same
I'm stressing I'm mad but I'm the only one to blame
I say this all the time but now I'm for real
I want to get out and stay the hell outta here
-Lil' Tb

From The Beat: Strong rhyming, straight from the heart, and we bet that a lot of people reading the Beat right now can feel your pain, 'cause they're going through it. No that you are for real, what are some for real steps you need to take so you can be with your son?

Let's Get This Thang Crackin'
I get so much money these haters just wanna know
And I get it to spend it staying high off that dro'
My life is the shhh but you should already know
My pockets so big got a ninja just walking slow
I'ma itch from being rich haters just wanna have this
Got all these haters on me like they some type of maggots
Stacks too big had to run home and bag it
Stash too heavy had to move to the back and drag it
I hustle hard homie I'm constantly stackin'
Nobody know what I'm packing
So let's get this thang cracking
Ain't no snitches over here and they ain't asking what happen
I ain't stopping 'till I hit touchdowns like John Madden

-Lil' Youngin'

From The Beat: The tight rhymes in this rap are a perfect example of the way street mentalities waste talent and steal lives. You're bragging about what here - having a gun, selling drugs, making cash money that you keep in your pockets? The real players in this country keep their bills in banks, they own property, they stay out the cuts, even if they own the cuts. Be a player for real.

My Cousin

Eric Jr. was my first cousin. Born in Oakland, killed in Oakland.

My street name is Ray Ray and that's all you need to know.

I'm here to give a quick resume about Eric. Born August 8, 1991 by Teresa R. J. Father didn't want any involvement. That is, until the death of his mother June 6th, 2006. She caught a virus that affected her spine, then went to her brain which caused brain death.

Our grandfather Delheart J. didn't want them to pull the cord so she passed away in due time. The insurance policy gave Eric the right to the money left over for Lil' E. But, my grandfather fought in court to keep him with us. We won.

Later on, Lil' E went to jail for a gun. When he got out he went back in for two more guns. Later on, he got back out. That same night of May 6th, 2007, was the worst day of my life. I found out my first cousin, the one I had to take baths with as a child, was shot and killed. I felt like a part of me died. The End. RIP Lil E

- Ray Ray

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing Lil' E with us. Your story is very moving. Would love to hear more about you two.

How Do You Make It?

What's good Beat? It's the same old stressful life in the hall.

I got some days left, just waiting for my release. I believe that being here for months has sort of opened my eyes but then again after being here so long you start to worry about how do you change after being here so long and how do you stay out of jail when you get out because like how you supposed to make it when you ain't got nothing and you stress out sometimes, how do you make it?

-Black

From The Beat: You ask a really good question. One thing for sure, you can't make it alone. That's why so many people fall back on their crew, or their homies when they get out, even if they know it's going to leave them in trouble. But the good news is that you can go out and get with a positive crew, find people who are also trying to get it together, if you hook up with an organization like Street Soldiers, or The Mentoring Center, or Youth Uprising. We all need support to make it in this world - reach out to the support that is available for you!

Thoughts

I'm sittin' here in my jail cell
The outlook of my life is jail or hell.
I got letter from my girl in the mail
She first say she love me but I can tell
It's like I was going to my goal and then I fell
I feel like these walls are closin' in on me in my cell when
I look in my mirror
who do I see
It's a reflection of my enemy it's like my soul is six feet
deep
From the town where I stay hustlin'
Big bro dead in the street
I'm cryin' but don't see him
'Cause his face is covered in the sheet
Blood everywhere brains and meat
But stay strong this demon in me flee

-De'Anthony

From The Beat: Our nightmares are sometimes where we face our biggest fears. And it sounds like you've been kept busy with yours. Each image you write is darker and sadder than the other, but it also bursts with the talent you show in your poem. So keep the poetry coming, maybe that's how you'll defeat the demon in you!

Tired

I'm tired of all the bull shhh
The waste of young lives
Violent gangs that do drive-bys
The paper chase that goes on
The parents that bring kids in the world they can't raise
The people that think gang-bangin' is a praise
How I can wish it could go back to the old days.

-Young Hotta

From The Beat: Well put, Young Hotta. We, too, are tired of the waste of young lives. Maybe we can find ways to change things today, rather than just wishing for the old days. We'd love to hear your ideas!

My Family

My Mom my mother never cusses, and she never did drugs. She never lies. She is a mother of ten who doesn't condone boyfriends or friends over the house.

Dad well let's see about him, there really isn't much to say, he's dead. Well I can say this, he's much closer to Vernon than me. Who's Vernon you say? Vernon is my dead brother.

Well my point is, I can't wait to go home, back to a strict household where I can wipe my own butt and wash my own clothes.

-Candace

From The Beat: Wow - you have lost both a brother and a father, yet your mother seems like a strong and powerful woman - tell us more about your family. Who are you closest too among your siblings? Are their grandparents, uncles, aunts who also help out? You have a life story worth telling, we hope to print more of it in The Beat!

The Good & Bad Of Gangs, Blocks, Turfs, Clicks & Hoods

To me being with my squad I just feel good 'cause we out drinking and smoking you know on girls, trying to get their numbers, on money tips, you know moving mean.. It feel like ever since I started banging like I got some type of title, so like the female just flock to us, but the bad thing about I got to watch out, 'cause we fonkin' and some females be set-up artist and I really gotta stay tucked 'cause having title is also like a targets. So I'm out y'all, see ya.

-The Good G

From The Beat: Who are you a target of? Enemies, cops, who else? What about being locked up? Is that a "bad" as well? You're in the same situation as almost everyone in the hall - still young enough that this life is new to you, but old enough to ask yourself what you want your future to look like. What kind of future do you picture for yourself?

Some Day I Will

Some day I will see you again
Some day I will win
Some day I will see you smile
Some day I will walk a mile
Some day I will be happy
Someday I will probably meet my pappy
Someday I will make it to the top
Someday I will probably get popped
Some day I will regret lettin' you go
Someday I will love to let you know
Some day Granny, someday

-Karra Bear

From The Beat: You and your granny must have had real love to inspire a poem like this... but you know it seems like you aren't sure which way that "someday" will take you, towards good things or bad ones. What would be the worst future you could imagine? And what would be the best?

Gang Activity

I feel that gangs are like families to some people. I'm not a gang member but I feel I still get the same looks as a gang member. It also depends on where you grow up. It really depends on your family and where you grow up, and which color and set you affiliate with. I got a lot of homies. Some die, some live, and if you play it smart, you won't be affiliated at all.

-Jm

From The Beat: It sounds like you've found a good balance. But how do you stay unaffiliated? Share your experiences with the Beat readers!

Tookie

I can't imagine me on deathrow nor in prison for life. Comin' in the big house is like lockin' me up with a lion and I gotta trust in God and my heart to survive.

Being in the Hall got me reading about Stanley "Tookie" Williams' story, in the streets to being on death row. I'm really mad at Arnold Schwarzenegger 'cause he denied Tookie's letter so he got executed. Arnold didn't know nothin' about Tookie. He was a real changed man and he created a lot of books for kids, teenagers, and for old people to change their life around from bad to good.

- Lil' Tamir

From The Beat: We are so pleased that you have been reading about Tookie. Continue to talk about him and his books so that more and more people can learn from him and his life. By the way, what else are you reading?

Get a Life

Hello world, it's the kid everybody love to hate and hate to love, which is why I self-picked this topic.

I've been in this juvenile hall for about three and one-half months, goin' on four by the time this piece comes out. I've been MIA. which people seem to think 'cause I don't tell if you're not in my circle. But these cats ain't solid like they used to be. That's why I'm the last of the dyn' breed. Ain't never gonna be none like this last generation. That damn near gone. And deep in these ninjas, deep in their hearts, they really wanna be me, plus I move too mean.

In these street that's why cats are real life snitchin', messing with the Feds or jus' plain getting' knocked down 'cause ain't no real in their bloodline, I know, 'cause you gotta be born in this lifestyle.

- Lil' Solid

From The Beat: Lil Solid, we hope in the continuation we learn about how you are going to use your real solid bloodline to keep yourself safe and on the outside. Do you want change?

Affiliated

People are affiliated in gangs or sets because when they're young and live in a dangerous community, like Oakland they have to join a gang for protection. If you are alone in the streets you might not survive.

I was once in a gang. I was in a gang because when I was little I saw that the older guys having lots of money, cars, girls and all that stuff, you feel me. So I wanted that too. I wanted money, cars, clothes, so I joined a gang and they got me selling drugs and representing my set.

-Slick

From The Beat: Is the gang life what you thought it would be? Do you have any regrets about your experiences with the gang? What are the positive things you've experienced, that you didn't anticipate?

Surprised

I am very surprised that the new president in the white house is a black president because there has never been a black president before. And I think that it's a good thing. I know that now we can see what he has to offer and also see what he changes in the United States. Also I want to know and see if he can change the economy and all the money problems there are.

-Salvador

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing your thoughts. We'd love to know- what would YOU like to see change in the United States?

Does Obama Have Enough Experience?

I think Barack Obama would be a good president and I think he is an educated man who could lead the united states no more than four years. But right now the United States is going through a lot because there is a war going on and I think John McCain should have been the new president because I think he has more leadership qualities than Barack Obama.

No disrespect to Barack Obama, I like him a lot I think he is a good man who is very educated. But I don't think he could handle all the pressure that comes along with being president... that will lead the United States.

I think John McCain will win the war fast like a NASCAR. But I like both of them. .. John McCain as a president and Barack Obama as a vice president. Now that will make the United States a powerful country.

-Farhad

From The Beat: Now that Obama has won, do you feel confident that Hillary Clinton, as the new Secretary of State, and Joe Biden, as Vice President, will be able to serve as experienced advisors to the New President? Do you think this team will be able to end the war?

Fear Factor

Fear was the name.

But the question is why fear me?

Do you see me in you?

Do you believe I am what you see on TV?

In movies? Or music?

Step into reality and see I'm a person.

I'm not an actor, I'm a factor.

A man of change.

I have a vision of success.

Movies are movies and music is music and so forth.

This isn't real. I am!

My color and race is not all bad and evil! Not all doin' wrong.

-Tone

From The Beat: Bravo! Stand strong against stereotypes, and never let the media tell you who or what you should be. In this powerful poem, you tell us what you are not, and you also give us a hint of what you could be... So what does it mean to be a man of change, to have a vision of success?

In My Dad's Shoes

I can see myself in my Dad's shoes. I know he is very upset because he is sentenced to life with no chance of parole.

I never knew how it felt for someone to take your freedom until I experienced it for myself in Juvenile Hall. He wouldn't want me to end up like him, locked up for the rest of my life.

-Eric

From The Beat: What do you think he would want for you? And what do you want for yourself?

These Cell Blocks

More than three hundred days boxed up in a cell thinkin' 'bout the day when I get released from hell got to take precautions to make sure I win 'cause these suckas out here will turn in 'cause they power hungry so they want them dividends so while I've been in a cell for more than a year a couple of homies passed an' jefitas cryin' tear but my only fears is of the man up above why you take him why I couldn't take that slug but I'm here for a reason isn't it twin techs screamin' for regiment but I rep my pride an' stay deep in it 'till the day that my body's in a ditch

(chorus repeat 2x)

I'm sittin' in the county an' I'm goin' crazy people say that I'm cool, people say I'm shady maybe it's true but don't try to plot 'cause my survival instincts kick in on these cell blocks

- Lil' Savage

From The Beat: Out of respect for our readers (and you, believe it or not) we took out the second verse, trying to keep the publication real but appropriate for all. If you write more verses, we'd be happy to add more in the next issue. You seem to be working out a puzzle with this song, and we'd love to hear how you'll figure it out. You know the reasons you are inside, you don't want your homies passing, yet you stay deep in it?

Is The Country Able To Move Beyond It's Racist Past?

I think this country will eventually move beyond it, but it will take a good long time to happen. I think that there will always be racism in the world but who knows, it might happen. I mean it most definitely changed because Barrack Obama became president, the first African American ever.

- Jorge

From The Beat: Besides having Obama in the White House, what needs to happen for the country to keep moving in that direction?

Life is Priceless

Ya'll need to keep it solid and stop coming to jail and calm down in those streets.

They just passed a law where you can't go up for parole every year no more in prison.

You can only go up every fifteen years now. It's called "prop 9."

So, if you go up in front of the parole board and they deny you, then you can't try again the next year. So, the smart thing to do to save yourself is get shhh together ASAP. Because life is priceless.

- Slick

From The Beat: The new state law is only about people on death row, but this is good advice for everyone, Slick!

My Girl

Well I'm just missin' my gurl Ashley right about now. I wanna say that I love her to death and ain't no one in the world that could get my heart like her. You're the girl that I'm down with an' I know you'll be down with me until the end of time.

- B

From The Beat: We're happy that you have such a great relationship. Are you keeping in good touch with her?

Home Sick

This is my 77th day in here and it's just hit me that I want to go home and be with the ladies. I just got off the phone with some of my female partners and I want to leave, but I got a while to go. Other than that I'm trying to be on the outs but I can't keep thinking about it or I'm going to get mad at myself for what I did.

-Jm

From The Beat: What about focusing on the future instead of the past? What do you want to do with the long life you have ahead of you?

The Eternal Crater

What separates love from hate?

Why is love so sacred and valued that People search the dark for an eternity Hoping they find that someone. But what everyone Seems to hold upon and have close to their hearts And uses as their own tool of eternal mischief is Hate! It seems people love to hate and It's making an eternal crater larger And larger by bringing destruction to Our young youth!

-Manny

From The Beat: You're right - this "eternal crater" continues to yawn and swallow some our youth. Too often they are blind and walk right into it. But you seem to see the crater, so what are you doing to make sure you walk around it, not into it?

Lock Me Up Either Way

What's up wit' it Beat? None much over in this side. Just chilling up in the unit doin' it live. Just kicking it.

This shhh's hecka bootsy up in here! Well the whole muckin' system tryin' to do me right now. I've been here since October 6, 2008.

Today is November 11, 2008. Well, the time I've been here ain't really nothin' but the reason I'm trippin' is 'cause my PO is trying to send me to R.O.P. for some old ass bench warrants from 2007. I haven't been in the hall since then but I moved out of town to change my ways. I succeeded but when I do good they lock me up either way.

So I think the system is a bunch of bull. So, that's why I'm on the "screw the world" mood again like I used to be. So all I gotta say is forget the system, judge, D.A., and any ninja that wanna test me. It's nothing.

- B

From The Beat: B, you explain well how the system can seem unfair. Don't stop trying, though! There is more chance of getting out of the system if you "do good" than if you don't, right? And you already know you CAN.

Next Court Day

What's up Beat? The topics you got aren't very good for me so I'm going to write about my next court day.

Well I got court on December 3rd, 2008, that's a month from now today is the November 11th, 2008, I'm hoping for me to get a release so I can make a change for me and my family.

That way I won't have to come here again. I be hella stressing in here cause I don't have my family. I really miss them, I guess that's it till next time.

-Yogi

From The Beat: Good luck on your court date and we hope you get the results that you're looking for. If you don't, just keep that positive attitude. You will be back with your family soon, and don't take your freedom for granted next time.

The Little Money Wasn't Enough

As I was growing up I was never poor or nothing like that. We probably went some days without lights or skipped some meals but we made it. That's why today I appreciate the little stuff these days. But I think that's what affected me. 'Cause as I was getting older the little money I was getting from my mom wasn't enough.

At the same time, I was growing up around my people from the neighborhood, and I watched them getting money, new shoes, clothes, and clean cars. Then I started seeing my brother come home with stacks. So I figured since I was around it I needed some too.

-Rodnelle

From The Beat: This is a really well written piece, but we are dying to know what happened next. You started off being happy with the little things, but what changed once you saw your brother with those stacks? What changed in your mind, and in your life?

My Thoughts On Obama

I think that president Barack Obama will be the perfect president. I wonder how it feels to be the first African American president of the U.S.A and how he showed that anything is possible. It's very remarkable to see history made.

-Kenneth

From The Beat: We do wonder how he feels also, and yeah it is remarkable to see history made. Some people have been waiting for this for a long time now. What do you think makes Obama special besides the fact that he's the first African American President of The United States?

Gang

When I first decided to be in a gang, I made my own gang called Burger Team. Then my cousin name was already ringing in the streets so I came out with a gang in his name when he got killed by somebody that was hating on him. You feel?

So I came out with that gang and we had got a gun so we can have a name. So I did what I had to with this shhh. Much love my ninja Burger. He was a beast out here so we gone keep it lit.

-Casey

From The Beat: We understand some of the reasons why y'all join a gang. But after while you're gonna find out that that path is only going lead you to a couple spots. And that's your local mortuary, or your in the State Pen for life. So if that's what you want to do with your life then we can't change your mind, but do know that you can do anything else that you wish to do. It doesn't always gotta be negative shhh.

Seein' Mom Through Glass

Well I'm not feelin' this topic today so I'm gonna write off-topic. Well I'm still in here, I was in another unit, but I got transferred to here, and man I'm mad because I got transferred, and it's hella boring in here. I'm still waiting to get picked up to go to camp.

I had visiting on Saturday but it wasn't the same as it was before in the visiting. Instead it was in the unit behind a window. Damn man it was not cool 'cause my moms started to cry and it made me sad seeing her cry. I couldn't hug her so she would not cry, I can't call them like I could when I was in the different unit. Moms out there stressing too - found out hoe her boy is doing and I'm missing my mom, hope she's OK.

-Bryan

From The Beat: It almost hurts just even reading this, and imagining you and your mother separated by that glass for the first time. Right now you are not with your loved ones, but you will be soon, and just hold on to the power of that love you feel for your mom, so it helps you focus.

My Life

I think I chose that life style because of the money and the girls. It was a bad choice to take that route down a path. But I have learned from my mistakes and I have been doing better trying not to get in trouble.

I sold drugs before like weed, e pills, and crack. I used to make a lot of money but I don't do it anymore. I've changed.

-A New Young Man

From The Beat: We all make mistakes but the big question is will we keep repeating our same mistakes? It seems like you have learned a lot. We're glad that you took that big step to change, because it is hard for people to do it. That fast money could be luring. How did you go about changing? And what advice can you give to your peers that maybe want to change but don't have the confidence or motivation to do it?

Everybody

Everybody joins a gang but they sometimes get blamed. However they never ever get down for they thang. When they get caught they snitch and they get tamed. When they get shot, there is no pot.

-Francisco

From The Beat: Maybe you shouldn't worry about everybody and just focus on yourself. Everybody is everybody. You can expect people to be the way you want them to be. All you can do is do you and hope to make things better for yourself.

Word Spillage

Let the lives be taken, awaken pain is forsaken. I'm ready for whatever, good weather, are you relatin' Whose hatin', the people not knowin' how to achieve it. They lose it, then they realize they really want to retrieve it

Believe it, I'm ready, stay steady, and that's fo' sure. I'm ready for whatever, got haters I know you know. Lets go "I'm old fashioned" I'll give you the one, two, three. Boulders on my wrist dominating and swinging

-Mays

From The Beat: You have talent Mays, keep writing!

Trouble!

Damn, I just want to go home, so bad, I don't want to be here no more. It is not the place for me. I'm still a kid, and I got my family, my nephew, and friends but I got to stay strong. I'm here to do my time and not to get into trouble. And when I get out I'm gonna stay out of trouble so I don't get into trouble.

If you think about it, your parents don't want you to get into trouble. They wanted you to stay out of trouble. If you think about it, it takes gas to come visit us in here. And lot of our parents don't have lots of money and if you think about it when they see you they get sad but they do not show it.

And a staff told me once that he sees lots our parents at the bus stop in the rain and it brings a tear to my eye just think of that when your out there stealing or some shhh. There's so much better things in this world then to steal and shhh. Why don't you go play sports or something. There's so much more out there in life. Well I got to go. Think about it.

-Daniel

From The Beat: Trouble... It's hard to avoid trouble sometimes, but you can manage it. Like you said look what parents go through just to go see their kids. There are a lot of people that care about the people that go in and out the halls, like the beat, certain counselors, family, etc. You bring up a good point. There are better things to be doing in life then spending time in a stinky cell.

First Crime

My first crime I got caught and I hoped it would be my last but it was not. After my first crime I could not stop doing them, even if I went back.

Until one day I got caught and the police beat my ass. After that I want to do more to make the cops mad and get money. And when the cops chase me I try to make them get hella tired.

Then one day I came back and I told a counselor and they spoke to me about life and it ain't all about hating cops and getting money. But I disagree on the money part but other than that I understand. I don't hate cops but I still get money you know the game.

-Charles

From The Beat: Your counselor was right. It's not about hating cops and money. But we would hate to disagree with you on the money part too. We ain't stupid and of course we need money for a lot reasons. But don't be stupid about getting your money either. You sound like a smart dude. Think about legit ways to make it, that way you won't have to deal with the cops or the system.

Imagining A Different Reality

If I was in Obama's shoes I would not only be stressed and nervous but I would also be excited because I have a chance to prove my doubters wrong. The first thing I would do is change the three strikes law.

-Change

From The Beat: What would you change about the three strikes law exactly? And would you also change the death penalty? And the system of trying juveniles as adults?

Beat Topics

This Historic Election:

Yeh, a Black man in the White House. An' not knowing what is going to happen on January 20, 2009, mostly likely more work for us Blacks and youths.

The Promise Versus the Reality of Gangs:

Never was a gangster. Just had friends who like being bad, you know.

Imagining a Different Reality:

Yeh, I see people shining all type and jus' think about being their shoes. But, really don't. Probably just for that moment.

- W

From The Beat: Maybe next week we can hear a bit more thinking on just one topic?

Regret

I'm a senior in school and I've joined a gang. But I've changed my mind after experiencing the brutal activities they participate in. I've found myself trapped, because in order to get out as a Crip, I must fight the head of the group and I must allow the members to carve a "C" on my back with a razor blade in remembrance of ever being one of them.

But as a personal agreement with the head before I joined was that I graduate. I shall be relieved of my duties as a Crip but still be remembered in history. For now I shall continue what I started.

-Angelito

From The Beat: That sounds kind of crucial. Carving a "C" with a razor blade? And you're suppose to graduate. How are you going to finish what you started? It doesn't look good. How can you trust your supposedly homies? What made you stop being a Crip in the first place? How can you avoid this altogether without any lasting marks?



Why Don't I Like Jail

The reason I don't like jail is because they look at you as a criminal. The food that we eat is nasty, and we are always stuck in our rooms. We barely see sunlight and we barely see our parents or little sisters and brothers. I say kids my age should stay out of jail because it ain't cool being away from our family, just layin' up in a cell bored wasting your time...probably doing more reading in your cell than you do on the outs.

But now me, I'm up in Camp Wilmont Sweeney doing 6-9 months for a robbery I did. They had me up in jail for two months. I was so bored up in there, missing my family, thinking about the bad choices that I had made and the ones that I can make in the future when I get released.

-Eddie

From The Beat: We're glad you are now at camp - make sure you enroll in all the programs - it'll keep the boredom down, plus you'll gain skills that you can use to get jobs and grades once you get out.

Stay Out The Streets

I believe where I came from is where I grew up is a part of my lifestyle. When I become more older, I start seeing surprises that happens at night, like gunshots for instance. I was attracted by the gang 'hood violence because me and my brother grew up around all the mess and our fella 'hoodmates.

Fo'real, though, it like when I be on the turf with the big homies, somebody always tryna slide through and clap at us, like it's good. I mean, when you a youngster, you won't listen or you won't understand. If you grown, it's not a game to you. It's like you been in the game so long, it's so loyal to you. It's just me, Dana, from the 'hood just knowing for a fact. I mean, my bra is a OG. It's a point of view for all you youngsters. Stay outta the streets or you will probably end up dead or locked up.

-Dana

From The Beat: We're not sure what all you mean, but we are sure that your conclusion is a good one. Will you be able to follow your own good advice to "stay outta the streets?" We sure hope so.

Hope For Change With Obama

Well, I think it's great to have a black president, Barack Obama. Ya know what I'm saying, ha ha. Well, I hope Obama does way better than President Bush. Then I hope he can get more jobs and get us out the war. And I hope they get the stock market back up to good.

I learned a lot of shhh out post at the store, post up at the block getting' money, doin' what you got to do to get yo' racks up, you feel me.

-Bushy Factor

From The Beat: We're not sure how to respond to you, because we see this as two pieces. The first expresses hope that the new, young president will be able to make the country better, and we feel that same hope. But the second sounds like you plan to go back to doing the very same things that got you here to begin with, and that undercuts your hope for change. So, along with the changes you hope the country will experience, what personal changes do you see happening in your own life?

Some Fools

Man, what's up with The Beat? It's ya boy, Grimmy. I'm gettin' out this thang in a few mo' days. I'm up to this group home for a few. Ima knock this one out 'cause I ran from the Walden House. I mean, y'all know what's up, no doubt 'bout that. About them guns and them drugs, that beef stuff, you dudes ain't nothing but some fools. But yeah, I'm out this thang.

-Grimmy

From The Beat: We're not really sure what advice you're trying to give here. Are you saying that being in the beef, taking drugs and staying strapped is the stuff of fools? If so, are these things you plan to leave behind you? If so, what does your future hold?

Straight 'Hood Status

What's up with The Beat? This M-Nyta on the beat in the 'hood life, got me? It's like an addiction; once you get a piece of it, you want more by the day. In my 'hood, we stay blowin' fat chops for breakfast. The sky is the limit; name it, we done did it.

Ninjas nowadays get caught up with the 'hood life and make mistakes...

-M-Nyta

From The Beat: Yes, and just like an addiction to meth, it can kill you even while you're having fun. Actually, we can name things that we are certain you have NOT done, despite your boast to the contrary, like hold onto your freedom! The rest of your piece was not appropriate for The Beat, so we can't print it.

She's Mad At Me

Man, this shhh is maney because they got a ninja in here for no reason. I missing my girlfriend, and she missed a thug. I know she do.

But I called her on the phone telling her what I'm going through. She told a thug she love me. She told me to keep my head up. Then I called my wife today. When I called, she told me I was cheating on her. So I told her I'm not.

She told a thug she seen my picture on another girl page. I told her she was my friend she like me, and I went to jail. Now she claiming me. My wife mad at a thug. I told her, "Don't trip. You know who I love."

She said OK, but she still made. But it was good talking to ya, Beat.

-Young Taddy

From The Beat: Well, it sounds like you're playing around with more than one girl. We think, at your age, you should have many girlfriends, but not if you call one of them your wife! You're way too young to have a wife (even in play), so even though we hope you work out your problems with her, we also hope you don't settle down until you are able to take care of a family. You can't do that until you are able to take care of yourself.

I Am Back

Hey Beat, this yo' girl Banana up in here. I'm back up in this g-thang going crazy up in here. Here my sis... she has something to say:

Sis: Banana, why are you back? Tell The Beat that, okay?

Banana: I ran from the place. I was doing good, and now I'm back up in here. I messed up everything that I had, like my ball scholarships. But the good thing is that City said that when I get out I can still go there and play ball.

Sis: Damn Banana, why did you run?

Banana: I don't know. I don't feel like talking about it. But to my hubby, I miss you so much. I'm back up in this weak-ass place. I wish you can come see me. I might not get out until 2009 — May 7, 2009, my birthday. 19. up in here I'm going to go 51/50 on my PO if I don't get out before Xmas and New Years.

Well, that's all in here, keep yo' head up and I love you hubby. Love, Banana.

-Banana

From The Beat: The three words we hate to read the most are: "I am back." We don't know why you'd threaten to go off on your PO when you should be going off on yourself! Your PO didn't put you back in the box, you put yourself here. You had so much going in your favor, but you couldn't resist whatever temptation brought you back in! Whatever brought you back was, at that moment, more important to you than your scholarships, your schooling, and your "hubby." All those things took second place to your own choice to please yourself. That's a reality you have to deal with. As long as you're pointing a finger at your PO (or anyone other than yourself), you'll just keep gambling with the one thing that matters, and that's your freedom!

My 'Hood Life

What it do with The Beat, yo? This yo' girl, E-Bones. Everybody know me. But yeah, my 'hood is ill, not sick. But you know I just be on the block with the ninjas holdin' it down, reppin', you know. People stay hatin' on our 'hood. They mad, but they don't want it. My family is from the 'je's and I was raised up in the 'je's.

-E-Bones

From The Beat: The one thing we know for sure is that you are NOT on the block reppin' your 'hood. You're locked up. Can you see a connection between those two things? We won't let you threaten anyone, or hold your turf up in The Beat, so we had to take out the last paragraph of your piece. All we can do is hope that you mature enough to see where your love for the turf has led you before it takes you down, down, down and you find yourself spending time in the "If only" world...

Losing Freedom

Missing my freedom! I regret ever saying I wanna bet locked up to be with my brother. He's in this place, too. But I hate soft-ass staff telling me what to do, telling me when to get up, when to shower.

I don't just hate it, I want my freedom back. Damn! And my custody got taken away from the person I love so much, my mom, just because I'm going to a damn group home! I'm gonna try my best to stay away from the weak-ass system.

-Poppa-Kidd

From The Beat: The things you hate about being here define every jail, and every jail is designed this way to make you hate it! What do you plan to do to "stay away from the weak-ass system?" You will certainly get your freedom back, but will you be able to hold onto it? How?

A Sad Picture

I broke bread with you and showed you where I lived
You talking, ninja, but you don't understand what real is
When it came to you, I would have killed
But it was my fault: I kept it too real, you had me fooled
I thought you was my freakin' ninja
I would've did 100 years 'cause I fell for you
But you showed me what a good heart these streets will
get a ninja
Not a thing but a sad picture
You hurt me when I found out you had shhh in yo' heart,
ninja

-Wooda

From The Beat: This sounds like the old story of trusting — even loving — someone, only to find out that the person you trusted or loved was not the person you thought he or she was. We're sorry you had this experience, but it's one that all of us have shared at one time or another. Sadly, it's part of growing up.

A Black President

What's up with The Beat? Shhh gonna be different, hopefully. Things is changing in this country. We just got a BLACK PRESIDENT! We won't truly know what's finta happen 'cause dude ain't in 'til January.

No, I don't think it's gonna help me. It might help someone else, though. I'm still gonna be in jail, so what's him being president gonna do for me?

I do hope he help out some people besides those confederate guys. I would've used a different word, but it won't get published.

-Drewski

From The Beat: We're not sure which word you wanted to use that you think we would have censored, but we get the point! If our new president can't help you, what can you do to help yourself? We think that Obama's election shows that the U.S. is maturing, and that change is possible. What about you?

The Police

What's up with The Beat?

Man, I hate the police. Man, they just want any reason to take anybody to jail. Man, I really hate them. But they say they doin' they job. But it's clearly to take people's freedom away. Man, I hate them, but what the police give they will receive.

-Vance Man

From The Beat: Your threats that the police will get theirs sound pretty empty when we see how many young men like you are locked up... or gone forever! As long as you see the world as you against them, you really can't win. Oh, you might hurt (or worse) an individual cop here or there, but over all, you will always be outgunned, out maneuvered, and out-lawed! Why do you think the police just want to take people's freedom? If you use your freedom to interfere with other people's freedom (or life), what should the consequences be?

Do Unto Others

Treat others the way you want to be treated. Give what you want to get. Give what you may want to succeed in life. Be a better role model to your family and relatives.

-Big Will

From The Beat: The principles which you express here come under the umbrella of "The Golden Rule." If everyone lived by these principles, it would be a far better world!

The Historic Election

Since Obama was elected president, it means a lot to me because the country gets to hear and see things change. When I had looked on the bottom of the TV screen on Nov. 4, and it said, "Obama Elected President," I was very surprised because it had never happened before. I think it'll be way better to have Obama for president instead of Bush, because I think the war would end.

-Gregory

From The Beat: Obama has raised all of our hopes for change, from getting out of the war to fixing the economy. But as you said, just getting a black man elected president marks a great turning point in America. Maybe the country is growing up!

To The Editors:

Why do everything have to be about gang or 'hood? That's like disrespecting me and my people. That's like saying you're better than us. Why? Because you went to school and we didn't. Every time people blame it on your 'hood or anything else, that gets me heated up.

-Kreepy

From The Beat: We're sorry you feel this way. We definitely don't feel we're better than you. In fact, we wonder what we would do in similar circumstances as you have had to adjust to. But, at the same time, we see an ongoing war that is destroying an entire generation of young men, and we can't remain silent about that. You know that you can always write on any topic you choose, whether we present that topic to you or not. Plus, we've asked for topic suggestions from our writers, so if you have some topics to suggest, we'd love to hear them.

Obama Brings Hope

I hope when Obama get put in office, I hope he make the world for black people better, and people who need jobs, like youth and people that get put out their homes.

I hope when he start, he make school better and he get better teachers for school. Some teachers say they don't care if we learn. They just care about if they get paid.

-Mitchell

From The Date: We know there are teachers like the ones you describe, but we also know there are very dedicated teachers who want you to succeed. Did you go to school when you were on the outs? If you say no, then what difference would it make if there were better schools? In other words, are you doing your part? We know President Obama will want to make things better for everyone, but we also know he will call on all of us to act responsibly. Will you be able to answer that call?

Getting Out

I'm hoping to get out 'cause being locked up in places like this isn't what was meant for me when I was born. Some day I'm gonna get out and get back on track. That's some advice for everyone writing in The Beat. Just get out and finish school so you can get a career. Stop hanging out with them snitches and fake-ass dudes.

-C-Rider

From The Beat: If being locked up was not what you were meant for, then tell us what it is you were meant for. And after you tell us that, explain how your plan to become what you were meant to become.

Street Poetry

I'm tired of being in this thing
 Day to day it's the same
 Forgot my first, because all they do is call me by my last name
 Locked down in these chains
 Can't see my family, mang
 People talk big in here
 But on the outs, I keep my than
 Can't be and will never be a lousy lame
 And I've been raised up around it
 So off tops, I've inherited the game

-Poki

From The Beat: Well, exactly, you inherited the game. You didn't invent it. It's not original with you. It's what you've been handed, and you've chosen to be a follower. We hope that as you grow into manhood, you'll examine all the things you've been taught, all the things you've been told, all the things you grew up believing to be true, and test them against your adult analysis. All of us are given a set of beliefs by our parents and elders, but we don't all have to follow those beliefs, once we're able to make intelligent decisions for ourselves.

"That's What Happens!"

What's up Beat? This ya boy Fat Mike. I'm sittin' in here again. I'm hella mad! Today I'm talkin' about the 'hoods.

Man, boom, boom, boom! That's what I heard almost every day. I saw my first dead body at the age of ten. It was a shooting outside of my house. My dad said, "Look! That's what happens when you join a gang." I told him I won't, but in my mind I said, "I'm going to get mine."

Then I never joined a gang. But I claimed a set. But I'm not in the beef. So y'all out there in the beef, sit back and step up yo' game.

I'm out.

-Fat Mike

From The Beat: It sounds to us like your dad has some real wisdom and experience to back it up. What other advice has he given you? You say you're not in the beef, but you also say that you're back in this place, and angry about it! Are you angry at yourself for giving away your freedom again, or at the system for taking it? If you're not in the beef, what changes do you have to make in your life to avoid coming to places like this?

My Surroundings

What's up with The Beat? This ya girl Tae G, aka Taed. Everybody know me, mayne I been I this 'hood shhh since I was a lil' youngin on the block with the thugs straight thuggin'. My life been the same. It ain't changed shhh. But I got stronger bein' around hella drama.

You got to stay aware of yo' surroundin's on the low 'cause ninjas come through bustin' every day. Since we been beefin' with them ninjas, them ninjas ain't killed shhh tryna slide through just to prove they with the shhh.

But they aim off your antennas is way up, dodgin' them bullets when they bustin' and bustin' back. Get at us on the low. We on the map.

I'ma stay strong, though, hold the homies down, and hop on anyone that disrespects, straight like that dawg. (I miss my sister.)

-Tae G

From The Beat: Okay, you might have to hop on us for disrespecting you, but we can't respect this piece of boasting about your 'hood and what you do to stay strong. If you REALLY "stay aware of yo' surroundin's" then you'll see where you are — behind thick walls taking orders from strangers and living in a box. This is not exactly how we define "strong." Just because you've been in this game since you were small is not a justification for continuing. It's time to start connecting the dots and understanding that what you are so proud of has made you a slave. Yes, it's only temporary at the moment. But if you give the system power, it can extend your slavery forever. Take a closer look at your surroundings!

Attempted Robbery

Once, I was going home. I was by my house and a car stopped me. He was trying to rob me. He said to empty my pockets. I ran. I was scared. The car couldn't follow me because it was a one-way street.

-Pancho

From The Beat: Well, we're glad you got away, and we wish things like this didn't happen. Have you ever been the one trying to rob someone else? Did your experience as the intended victim change anything about how you look at things?

Freestyle With Skip (For The Females)

I'm at it again. Here we go. Looky...
 Chea baby girl, I trust you an' all,
 But I got to know if you could stand when I fall
 You gotta a ninja slippin' like I'm on a wet flo'
 But will you hold a ninja down when them feds hit the do'?

See, I got yo' back and them clothes off the rack
 But if I got knocked, would you run with my stacks
 I'ma hustle ninja that wanna ride or die chick
 She fly, she cook right, and oh, she so thick
 But check it out, I gotta soul workin' for me, a soul mate
 One that's gone always keep me fresh, like a Colgate smile

And I would walk a long mile to show her she my baby girl

And I'm diggin' her style
 I know these young girls ain't got no heart
 But don't leave me Baby if I cry in the dark
 'Cause, girl, you got me focused like a test from the start
 and you gon always come first like the swings at the park

-Skip

From The Beat: We're somewhat disappointed in this effort, Skip, even though we can understand why your mind would be focused on a sexy girl. But when you say you want a "ride or die chick," you sound like any other immature boy, rather than a young man with a baby girl to think about... We hope this was more you showing off your rhyming skills than truly representing what you're thinking...

Keep Your War Stories To Yourself!

Man, this ya young thug they talkin' 'bout. My shhh too explicit fo' this Beat shhh. So, I'ma just say a lil' somethin' that's on ma mind.

Man, ninjas be in this joint hollerin' they did this and did that. Ninja, keep ya war stories to yourself, for real. If ninjas 'bout what they be talkin' 'bout, keep it to yourself and get active, for real. Ninjas is puppies in this big dog shhh.

But I'm gone, for real. Keep ya heads held high and don't let the crackas keep ya down.

-Cal

From The Beat: You can blame "the crackas" for keeping you down, if you want, but as long as you keep giving them reasons, they will keep putting you away. So, we have to wonder, are "they" keeping you down, or are YOU keeping yourself down?

In The Shoes Of A Free Man

If I were free right now, I wouldn't do nothin' to get locked up. I would just chill. I wouldn't steal or kill. But I will keep it real and say how I feel. For real.

-Thomas

From The Beat: We wish you had taken this a step further, Thomas, by actually imaging yourself free and writing as if you were already out there chilling. Does your determination to stay crime-free on the outs come from being locked up, or is something else responsible for your maturing?

If...

What's up Beat Within? If I was Asian, I'll be smart. I would get As in school. I'll be rich, have a good job. I would live a big-ass house with five kids. And I would have a fine wife and live a good life.

-Dennis

From The Beat: If you think that all Chinese are smart, or that all Chinese have good jobs and live in big houses, you're operating on stereotypes. In every group that can be described as "they," you will find smart and stupid, rich and poor, good and bad. In other words, people are people!

Obama Better Than McCain

'S up with The Beat? This Lil' Kut chillin' in here hella bored stayin' out of trouble, feel me. I'm happy Obama got picked because he better than McCain. Obama really tryin' to help, I think. I just hope he make changes.

Other than that, I'm just stayin' focused and waitin' for that day.

-Lil' Kut

From The Beat: We also are proud that Barack Obama will be our next president. What changes do you hope he makes?

The First Black President

The first black president means a lot to me. It opens more opportunities for blacks to get jobs. Now every black boy or girl can say, "I want to be the 2nd black president!" I am not surprised. I just hope he doesn't get killed.

-Stephen

From The Beat: Yes, it's very exciting to think the country has finally grown up enough to put its most racist actions in the past. We looked at the photographs of young black children looking at Obama on election night, and there was a new hope and a new pride in their eyes. Does his election inspire you to want to change anything about how you live your life?

Don't Change My Words!

What's up with it, Beat? Shhh, I'm chilling. I just want to say stop changing my words. If it's not something you like, don't put it into The Beat at all. That shhh ain't cool when I expect to see something I wrote and it is not there. Makes me not want to write at all, fo' real, though. Thank you.

-What Are You Smokin'

From The Beat: Well, this piece goes in exactly as you wrote it, but we can't make that promise with everything you write. Like all magazines and newspapers, The Beat has its rules (some of them imposed on us by the system) which we can't violate. If that doesn't sit well with you, then it's your choice not to write. But as long as you do write, we'll always have to make sure that your writing doesn't cross the line... Thank you!

Reality

There is only one reality to me. That is what is happening right here, right now. The struggles I go through every day keep me from imagining different scenarios and from sympathizing with anyone else. It is better to stay focused on your current problems and not get distracted with fantasies, because where I'm from, you can't get caught slippin'. You need to stay on top of the game and play it right, before the game plays you.

-GG

From The Beat: We're not sure we agree with you. Of course you have to stay on your toes and be aware of life around you. But that doesn't mean you can't use the imagination that god gave you. It is that imagination that gives people hope and may even lead to doors which you hadn't known about before, and which, if opened, could change things for you. Is handing over your own freedom to a cold system an example of playing the game right before it plays you?

Clear Your Mind

What's up with The Beat, man? When you come to the halls, it's time to slow down. So, whatever you was doing before you came got you here. So, while you doing yo' time, you should clear yo' mind.

-B.Wizz

From The Beat: How do you clear your mind? What thoughts come to you while you're clearing your mind? How will this exercise help you stay out once you touch down?

Things I Like To Do

Wha's up, Beat Within? This yo' boy Alvin from San Francisco. All right, let me tell you something about me. If you know me, read my shhh. If you don't know me, don't read my shhh, all right?

The best thing I like to do is smoke 'dro and rob ninjas of they shhh and kick it with my ninjas, you feel me. I love my bruhs, and they have my back 'til the end. Forget this shhh! I'm out.

-Alvin

From The Beat: Apparently, getting locked up is also in that list of things you like to do best, since those things (smoking 'dro and robbing people) lead straight to jail, which is where you are! If going to jail is an example of your brothers having your back, then we think it's time for you to look after your own back, because what you've got with the choices you've made is a back against the wall!

What's The Point?

Why I imagine a different reality when you have to live with what's going on now? I don't se the point in that. When you get snapped back into reality you go be hot because you make believe life better than what you live now. That's why I keep it 100% real. Chea, I'm out.

-The God

From The Beat: We can't agree with you that focusing only on the here and how is keeping it "100% real." We think keeping it real means exercising all the faculties that god (not you) gave us, and that includes our imaginations. Do you exercise your body? Why? Why not just be satisfied with what you have now? The reason is because you can imagine yourself stronger, more defined, and because exercise keeps you healthy. Imagining things outside your day-to-day reality is another exercise that keeps your mind healthy!

When A Ninja Broke

What up with The Beat? Here go this rap about when you out and you ain't got no money:

When ya money messed up, it's hard for you to think straight

Seem like a ninja life on park when he ain't got cake
First thing cross a girl mind she ain't got to take
You can stay broke forever, or you can make it shake
'Cause when you broke, girls talk to you any kind of way

When you broke, girls don't want to hear shhh you got to say

If you ain't built for this street shhh, then get out the way

'Cause when you broke, everybody down
You either get money out there or you frown
Wait, you think a ninja go give something then keep waiting
You betta suck up ya pride and chase it,
'Cause when a ninja broke, he ain't s'posed to have patience

-Rocket

From The Beat: The biggest problem with chasing that money is the trail too often leads you right to where you are this minute! (We had to change one of your rhymes which used words that aren't appropriate for The Beat...)

What It Is, Part 2

It seems like every week y'all come with these weak-ass topics. Man, come with some shhh we relate to. And even when we do write, you rearrange what we say, or make it seem not true what we write. That how we want put in The Beat, not how y'all want.

-Terrance T

From The Beat: We're sorry our topics don't come up to your standards. But since we always tell you that you can write on any topic you choose, we don't think your complaint has much merit. As for changing your words, we try to keep them as you write them, but we also have rules, like any publication. We won't promote gunplay or turf war; we won't allow hate words; we won't let you incriminate yourselves. If you don't like those writing rules, you have to either start your own magazine, or write your own book!

They Don't Really Know Me

If only you knew my nature
The essence of who I am
My ambitions are now legendary
But I am a simple man
The world is convinced they know me
They have crucified and analyzed me

-Yung D-Bo

From The Beat: It appears that you didn't have time to finish this poem. So, we'd love to read the rest of it. What are your legendary ambitions? How have you been analyzed and crucified? How will you change this picture?

Change For The Country

This is what I think about this change in history. What I think that this is a good thing for our country. He is the first black president, and he knows how it is like for a person of color when growing up. I think the changes that will come to us will be in our favor.

I am a Martian,

-Et

From The Beat: Yes, many people are very excited about the possibilities for change under this new president. What specific changes "in our favor" do you expect Obama to bring about?

My Block

On my streets, on my block
It's so hectic and wild, people gettin' popped
Sellin' rocks
Block so hot police runnin' through everybody's spot
Feds think it's sweet
Tryin' to find everybody's heat

-Taco

From The Beat: Not all your homies are out on the block/ Too many are gone, or enslaved behind doors, locked/ If you war with the feds, you won't win/ And if you war with god, it's a sin/ So, if you have a plan, let us see/ 'Cause without one, you can't stay free!

Why They Doin' This?

My name Lil' Rocko, believe that guns and 'hoods is not like they say it is until someone get shot. That when the gangbangin' starts. It's all fun and games 'til someone gets killed. So the people that we call the big homies give us guns to take their own lives away. When we get caught, we come to YGC. Why they out there doin' them?

-Lil' Rocko

From The Beat: There are things which we just can't understand about what you've written. We think that you should read your pieces out loud, because your own ears will find things that don't make sense, and which you can correct before you hand the paper in. Are you blaming the big homies for the shootings on the street? What responsibility do you have for having your freedom taken?

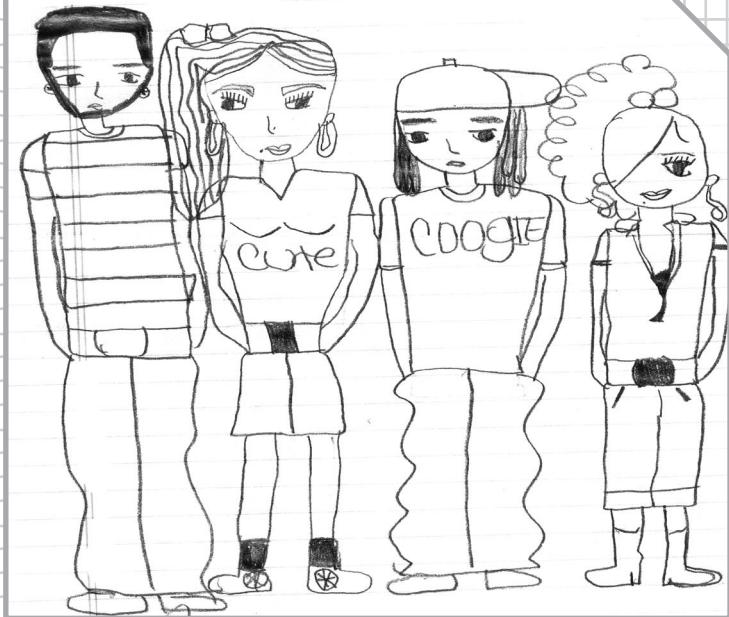
Runnin' Everybody Around Me Crazy

This Cam, comin' directly from ICR, you know, still down, but still movin', ya dig? I jus' got done lookin' at my life from a distance, an' I see that my future can go two different ways. I can either try my luck bein' successful, which would be hard, because of my street status, or I can jus' hit the streets hard. Either way, it's gon' be stressful.

I ain't never gon' forget my cousin or any of my dead homies, so I feel as though that's a must. I do wanna change, but I don't know if it's possible. I keep it real wit' e'rybody around me, an' when I'm in the streets again, I got the world's most advanced obstacle course, the hardest game since the Rubik's Cube. I gotta face the game, also known as life, where nobody's a winner, where everybody's the underdog. The way I think, feel and act are all factors in whether I live or die, love or hate, kill or let live. It's too many PIs (potential informants) and snitches, so that's two ways I can lose my life—everybody's suspect. I cut my dog off. I heard he snitchin', too.

-Cam

From The Beat: Is it your street cred that you want to maintain, that is your challenge in the outs, and/or is it restraining yourself when mess comes up? Maybe one of your homies gets dissed, shot, whatever, and you feel responsible to make it right. Now it's up to you. How can you handle personal challenges and leadership problems when your family, your homies are faced with trouble, without inciting any violence yourself? That's when you have to rely on your wisdom, not your fists or your weapons, which may also save your own life.



In A Parent's Shoes

If I had a child right now, I probably wouldn't be in here because I'll have a big responsibility. It might be a little task because on how I started at first. But after a while, I'll know we'll get it together with my job and my other income, feel me.

And also to have my family right, ya dig. I already got my mind good, so when I'm ready, no telling what I would do.

-Weezy

From The Beat: We're not sure that having a child would solve anything for you because it is such a huge responsibility to be a real parent. But the fact that you've got your mind right means that you can wait for the right time to be a parent, and that way you will be the best parent possible. What did it take to make your "mind good?"

Obama Becomes President

Yes, finally we got a Black President up in the White House. I was so happy when they announced it. I know all the black people were celebrating. It's not just 'cause he's black, it's just that he's for all the minorities.

I knew McCain wasn't gonna win. I hope Obama can get us out of the shhh we are in now. I know some white people are dumb heated. Oh well, a ninja is president, get over it. Well that's what I have to say about Obama being president. Go black people! LOL.

-Fame

From The Beat: Your optimism and pride are going to change the country. You just have to be part of that change. You can start with changing yourself for the better.

*I want to make it in life
and I don't want to stay
locked up for life. So Beat,
please give me some ad-
vice, please!!!*

Coming Up

I grew up in these San Jose streets. As a young teen, I got involved in the gang lifestyle. At 15, I got my rounds from my brothers from my hood. I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was a late night Friday.

After that day, I was posted with the homies everyday. After awhile, lots of the homeboys got locked up but that didn't stop me from doing my thang. I was down 'til the wheels fall off, whether it was locked up or on the streets, a lot of people that thought they were really down for the hood end up leaving us hanging, but very few take the same path I was, but Beat it's time to be out. Alrato. We still alive!

-Droopy

From The Beat: Well Droopy, you didn't quite let us know if things were different than what you thought they were gonna be. It seems like while writing this piece you got carried away by the idea and image of your lifestyle again. Next time, try writing about the non-glamorous part.

Free Talk

Today is a special day. It's Lil' Uce's birthday and you know...I spent it in here. Well its kind of hard 'cause to me a birthday is an important day.

Not only that, I'm leaving pretty soon to do some time at the ranch. It's sort of a big step for me, and I don't know if I'm going to pass my program. I'm going to have the habit to run but I don't want too 'cause I want to make it in life and I don't want to stay locked up for life. So Beat, please give me some advice, please!!!

-Lil' Uce

From The Beat: Aloha little bruddah. You have a lot to look forward to in life and you seem to have a positive attitude. Many people can give you similar advice, but we want to encourage you to have the courage to look beyond into your future. Every time you put your mind towards accomplishing something positive (even if it's going to be a tough road ahead), you will more likely achieve it AND (if you keep your heart and sharp mind open) you will draw positive people into your life.

My Hood

In reality, there are no promises, not in the varrio. But, to be real, before I became part of my hood, I had doubts or bad feelings about the notorious life. I believe everything happens for a reason.

See, in life, there's a certain time where people or youngstas make a decision. You go down paths and the path I took I loved. To this day, I love it. No matter what people talk masa about the hood life, I could care less. I love my hood for the fact that I was raised there. I grew up there.

My memories are historically marked on the houses and streets of San Jose. I wouldn't take the hand of time back for nothing.

-Nena

From The Beat: You talk with such clarity and honesty about these issues, but we still feel like you are not telling us everything that you feel about this life. On one hand you talk about how you were working and not hustling, but then you represent so hard. You are a complex woman, Nena, complex.

President Miranda

If I was the president of the United States, our country would be a lot different from how it is now. I would change the laws so they couldn't charge minors as adults and I would stop the Three Strikes law.

I don't think anyone should receive a life sentence, unless I mean it was a sick in the head individual, like they got locked up for child molesting because you must have something wrong with you to do some shh like that. I would make everything more understandable and more reasonable.

And, as for the cops, they get away with everything right now. If they were to kill someone, the only thing that they would get is a suspension. I think that's all bullshhh. Well, that's all I got for now.

-Miranda

From The Beat: Hmm, you might want to have your platform a little more figured out before you run for president, but we think you would make a great candidate if you really talked to your peers and the people in your community and took their issues to the top.

United in San Jose

We keep it united in my hood
We always up to no good
We always on our toes
We are hated by a lot
'Cause we are forced
To funk with other hoods
Our funk is all bad
When they shot a homie
From the hood
We show no love
Every time we check them
They don't want the funk
They don't want to see my hood
This city of San Jose!
So we keep it G
And let these rivals know
That our hood isn't a joke

-Mm

From The Beat: Keeping it united may be one way to protect your loved ones, but is your way of life always defensive, or are you sometimes guilty of starting the violence that ravages your neighborhood? Do you believe that there is a way to keep the neighborhood safe without having to battle with others and jeopardize your freedom?

Later On In Life

I never really knew what I wanted to go to college for. I still don't to this day. I asked a teacher if I could get a couple career or job choices. So I chose something that pays great and is pretty good to do for the rest of my life.

Now I wonder if being something, randomly, will help me or be enough. I chose construction because I know it is something that I would like to do later on in life.

-Tuan

From The Beat: We spend so much of our time at work. That means we ought to like whatever it is we do. If you know that you enjoy doing construction work, you already know a lot about what will help to make you happy. What could be more unpleasant than spending your precious time at work you don't enjoy. When we enjoy our work, it doesn't feel like 'work'.

Saying No

I remember when I had to swallow my pride. Once, I almost went along with my bro, messy, when he wanted to go on a robbery. We wanted to do it so we can come up and have some money. He really wanted to, but I told him, "no, let's stay home." I didn't want to say no, because we are best friends.

Although I said no, it hurt to say so. When he went ahead with the robbery and ended up getting caught by the cops.

-Baby P

From The Beat: Well, sometimes, a person's pride gets him/her into trouble, and yet other times, pride is what is needed to help a person speak up and represent their cause! I think in this case, you decided to use your good judgment above all else.

Part of History

This election made me a part of history because for the first time ever, we are going to have a black president.

To me this means that there's going to be a lot of changes for the next couple of years. It hasn't really changed me at all.

Well, Obama already won, but what I hope changes is the gas prices, I hope the juvenile justice laws change and the prices on the houses keep going down. So, when I get a good job, I can buy one.

-Axel

From The Beat: All of us want to own a home some day, but it's a lot of work. First step is to take the right steps in getting out of the system legitly. What's your plan?

The Streets

I'm steppin' over dead bodies
Homies bangin' to the core
Females selling their bodies like that's all they are made for
Welfare lines just to feed our seeds,
I'm so sick of the greed,
I run the streets at night,
All I see is hunger, fear and pain,
But, I'm staying strong,
With my head held high,
Though I'm barely hanging on,
On my block another one got shot,
Another kid without his daddy,
But, the game won't stop

-Reaper

From The Beat: This is a stark poem and you've helped to remind us that yes, the game probably won't stop anytime soon. But, we would like to ask, how does one get out of the game? What are some of the examples you've seen?

A Favorite Book

The first book I ever read was "Everybody Poops." Since then, I've had to come to terms with the fact that girls can poop too.

-T-Top

From The Beat: That shouldn't have taken too long. Now then, on to more great revelations.

That Creepy Sound

It was a dark, Hallow's eve night. I was lying in my warm, cozy bed, when I heard strange noises outside. They went clackity-clackity-scr-a-ape - clackity-clackity scr-a-ape. I lay there, wondering what could make that creepy sound.

When it came again... clackity-scr-a-ape clackity-clackity scr-a-ape, I nervously got out of bed and peeked out of my window. I saw a weird light that turned everything blood-red in color. It came from a chromium, saucer-shaped vehicle. The ramp was hanging wide open.

Then came that sound: clackity-scr-a-ape clackity-clackity scr-a-ape. The sounds were getting closer. I got back in bed. There were voices at my door. Then they were knocking on my door and softly saying my name. Payne... let's go Payne... The voices were soft...soothing...creepy. I heard the voices come again as the knocking turned into pounding, "Come on Payne, let's go..." Then I hid under my blanket. The doorknob turned slowly. My heart beat faster. Then the creatures yanked off my blankets: they were my parents, and they yelled, "Don't you ever listen to us!?"

-Arctic Fox

From The Beat: Whoooo.... We were worried. Thank goodness, it was only a your parents, what did they tell you? What was that creepy sound?

Election '08

To tell you the truth, I never thought we would ever have an African-American president. It feels pretty cool to be apart of history. I can tell my kids that I was here when the first black president was elected.

In Obama's speeches, he talks about all the good things he's going do for the country. To me, I think he's going do very well as president and get America back on its feet. I feel that this change is for the better.

-Dave

From The Beat: Yes indeed, when you put it like that, you will definitely have something to tell your children about it, even your grandchildren! We all hope the best for Obama's term. Let's all stay tuned and keep supporting our new president so that he can accomplish putting the country back on its feet..

A Story About Running

Let me tell you a story about running. Every time I try to run away from problems, such as a relationship, probation, and family-- any kind of problems, I always end up under the influence and committing crimes. Then, I end up in here, locked up. I realize that every time I do that, all it would do is bring more pain and frustration to myself, and everyone I try to run away from.

-Taz

From The Beat: May we kindly ask...what is it about facing problems that seem to intimidate you to the point that you don't want to be sober? We are also realizing from your piece that you have given in and decided getting drunk and getting in trouble is a good substitute for trying to face your problems or work out conflicts with those you love. We ask you to please stop being afraid and know that just as you can be physically strong, you can also learn to be emotionally strong by dealing with the problems.

Questions

If I fell off tomorrow would you still love me?
 If I didn't smell so good would you still hug me?
 If I got locked up and sentenced to a quarter century
 could I count on you to be there and to support me
 mentally?
 If I went back to a hoopy from a benz
 would you poof and disappear like some of my friends?
 If I was hit and I was hurt would you be by my side?
 If it was time to put in work, would you be down to
 ride?
 I'd get out and peel a ninja cap, and chill and drive.
 I'm asking questions to find out how you feel inside.
 If it ain't rap 'cause I flipped burgers at Burger King,
 would you be ashamed to tell your friends? You feeling
 me?
 If I wrote you a love letter, would you write back?
 Girl...it's easy to love me now.
 Would you love me if I was down and out?
 Would you still have love for me girl... ?

-Koolie L

From The Beat: We had to eliminate some of your inappropriate questions. And we have questions for you. Do you believe there are limits to what you can ask someone to do? Do you think it's fair to ask someone you love to break the law for you? Do you think it's right to put your loved ones at risk? We all want to be loved, but we have to earn love, by being loving and respectful and kind to those whose affection we cherish. Think carefully about what ask others to do for you. Be fair. Be kind.

Respect

At times, it takes swallowing a little bit of pride. Dang, it just happened right now that I was thinking about what was irritating me, even though the comment wasn't directed towards me...like we are the kind of people that have no emotions. Trust, even the hardest, most cold-hearted folks in the world, deep down, maybe even deeper than normal, that a person has feelings. Even though at the end of the day, you want to beat someone up who sits behind that desk, you'll have to respect him/her.

It is not because they have a badge, or they look intimidating, but for the fact that those people that come here, whether their intentions are good or bad, whether they are big and muscular, or as small and skinny...they have all accomplished something. They have earned what they worked for and even though you might hate that person, you have to respect them. To all, stay strong in the mind, body, and soul. Take care of yourselves and your loved ones. Even though you are here, right now, it doesn't mean you can't be grateful and learn from this experience.

-Eagle

From The Beat: We really like this free write, stream of consciousness writing. We hope that you do more of this kind of writing. This practice can lead to a great short story or a good book!

Running

I think people who run are stupid. Running from programs or the ranch is freakin' stupid. Why run from a six-month when you have like a few months left? Go on the run for two or three months, get caught and end up doing a bunch of dead time. Get sentenced then do another six months for no darn reason when you could have just roughed out a couple months and be out sooner rather than end up dealing with a bunch of crap.

-Wonk

From The Beat: Very true, yet many-many young people do exactly what you wrote about.

Wish I'm in county jail...

I think it's easier to live life in an institution. The reason I think that is because I'm 18 now, and I've been in and out of juvenile hall since I was a very young teen.

I am currently here writing, but I wish I could be in county jail or kicking it with my own. Yes, I'm white, not racist, but white and damn proud to be. I have been to both county jail and another institution. Three months ago, I went to county jail got sentenced and went to Elmwood. From there, I went to the barracks on the farm. My charges were as an adult-- possession and sales of drugs.

Yes, I sold weed and got caught at 18 for a felony. My mind is institutionalized and the life outside, I'm a business-man / drug dealer. All money is green to me. Skin color means nothing outside these walls but in county jail, or prison, it matters. Juvenile hall is chump time. I'm stuck doing the time because of a violation of probation-- it's nothing.

I think I want to go to county because I would be taken care of, minimally, and respected. It sucks to know I'm going nowhere in life, and I'll eventually end up in prison like my cousin. I've accepted my life and I am fine with this life. It sucks to know, but business can still be mine in county and prison. Money is green from all hands!

-Young Wood

From The Beat: It sounds like you have resigned yourself to live with two things, making money from selling drugs and doing hard time. Our question is, why? You are very young and have so many years to experience the spontaneity of life...doesn't that sound better than money and prison?

Swallowing Your Pride

Well, as I find myself coming to your program, which by the way, we all appreciate, and give gratitude to all of you who come in out your own time to give some individual some support and reading the new topics each week.

One topic caught my eye right away, "swallowing your pride." As I sit here and reminisce about what I was doing on the street to others who would look at me too long, or shake my hand too long... just any little excuse to let out a furious rage upon them.

As we all know we are incarcerated away from society so all we go in our own little city (our units) filled with all different kind of people, different staff, just things you're not accustomed to in general.

-Eagle

From The Beat: It's a must to swallow pride at times, especially when you are in the situation that you are in.

What's Easier?

Well, what's easier? Life inside or out?

To me, life on the inside is easier because you get every thing you need in here—your clothes, food, and you really don't have to do much. But, once you are out, you have to work for food and everything else. Not everyone has a place to stay or have a roof over his/her head. But in here, you'll always have a roof over your head. I really doing have much more to say so all doing real time, stay strong and keep your heads up.

-Rascal

From The Beat: Your piece is reminding us of something that Americans don't like to admit. We live in one of the richest country in the world and our child poverty rate is as high as Third World countries. When you talk about how being the hall provides for your basic needs when on the outs, you may not have that, we want to say we understand the difficulty you face at such a young age. We hope that you will also utilize the hall's education to help you get a head start to live a life that meets basic needs.

Which is Easier?

I feel it goes both ways. It's easy in here and on the outs. It's also hard in here and hard on the outs. While you are locked up, it's hard emotionally, but easy, physically. It's emotionally hard in here because you're under a lot of stress—you are forced with time and you are held away from the ones you love.

You are also stuck in a little room all day. It's easy physically because everything is handed to you all you have to do is behave. It's easy on the outs because you got a lot of support from people and you can be how you want to be. It's hard because you got to work and make your own money to support yourself if your parents don't help you.

-James

From The Beat: We appreciate the thought and detail you've put into teaching us, from your perspective, what the challenges are on the outs and on the inside. As with many moments in life there are positive aspects and negative aspects. Hopefully, that fact keeps us from feeling too down during hard times.

What Do I Regret?

What's up world? Well, y'all already know, I'm fresh off of the restructure program.

Y'all always asking me what I regret, so here it is. I don't regret robbing, stealing, selling drugs, or killing. I only do what I got to do to survive.

I do regret some of the things that I did or forgot to say to my loved ones. Ever since I saw my homie get laid out with his eyes closed, I became, "cold blooded." Growing up in the hood, you give a ninja an inch, and he'll take a whole mile from you.

I feel like I have a devil on one side and an angel on the other. The devil is everything that I've seen and experienced—things that made me rob, steal, and kill.

The angel is my mama. She would tell me to slow down, 'cause she doesn't wanna see me back in jail or in the casket. But, what is worse, waking up in the pen or sleeping up under the dirt?

Oh, and I do regret some of my tats. Now I wanna get something else tatted there instead.

-Reaper

From The Beat: Why do you NEED to rob, steal, sell drugs, or hurt to survive? We hope you can write more about that.

Outs or Locked Up

I think it's a little of both. When on the outs, you don't have to be around people that you don't want to but also at the same time, in here, you don't have to worry about your enemies trying to shoot you when you are not expecting it. But, that is not to say there not a lot of danger in here...think about it.

You are putting some of the most dangerous people on the streets and putting them in a small place and hoping that nothing happens. You are putting enemies who, on the outs, would kill each other, next door to each other. On the outs, it's easy to stay outta trouble but once you are in trouble, there no escaping it while you are on the outs. Unlike in here, it's harder to start trouble but easier to get out of it because no one wants to mess things up for themselves before court.

-Ryan

From The Beat: Your point about putting the most dangerous people in an enclosed space and hoping no disaster will happen is interesting. We'd like to look at the same point with a different perspective...all the folks locked up also have some important things in common, what do you think?

My Baby's Momma

One thing I regret doing was when I cheated on my baby's mom. I hurt her so much. I never meant to and I never will again and I promised her. Because when that happened she was so down and I hated it so much!

Now I'm having a kid with her. She's pregnant now and I'm looking forward to having a good long life and relationship with her! I love you, Crystal.

-L

From The Beat: That's an understandable regret. We can guarantee you that it won't be your last temptation, so, if you intend to keep that promise, be prepared for similar situations and be resolved to do the right thing.

Easier in or out?

Being out is being free,
But a little less than you can be.

Depending on how much you put out is the amount you conceive.

Working hard to get your check, or making bundles in the street.

Would you rather lie down on your stomach or stand tall on your feet?

But, either one can lead, to getting popped like a pill,
Anything can happen when your neighborhood is a battlefield.

Because every good album will have a bad song
Felling good doing right but yet it still goes wrong
So, which one is easier, I say they are both the same.
Because whether you "in" or "out" you still suffer with pain.

-JonJon

From The Beat: That's it. Your piece grabs our attention and you are pointing out to us that it is the individual pain, the suffering that is at the heart of the problem. That's where the solution has to start or the healing must begin.

Nightmare

Closed tight eyes to bring your horror and fright,
Hour after hour they lost throughout the night,
Scary spooky thing to scare you out of your wit,
Cannot open your eyes till the lights are lit,
Anxiously you wait that last and final hour,
Confused by what's reality and what you see,
Is this your nightmare or is this your dream?

-Saw

From The Beat: We are writing to you from Dreamworld. We regret to say that you have failed to pay your admission fee. So you'll have to wake up - get out of here.

Act of Kindness

Why do some act with kindness only when knowing there's something involved?

Why do some find it hard to act kind from the bottom of their heart?

Why is it difficult? Some say it's pointless to do something where there's no gain.

To me, I think everyone should act kind with no intentions of receiving anything for doing so. Act upon yourself, help one another, and everyone around you.

The favor would be repaid when others act kind back.
What goes around comes around, right?

Try and do good and gain some positive karma.

-EightBall

From The Beat: Nothing we can add to this. Fine advice EightBall.

Inside or Out

Life on the outs is definitely better. But in here, it is easier.

On the outs, you'll be able to do what you want. I hella miss the touch of my lady, just being able to lay down with her, as well with seeing my son.

As for in here, everyday is the same. And, you don't gotta worry about money problems, getting' killed, or just everyday struggles. It kills me every day though, thinking what is happening on the outs to my loved ones.

-Reaper

From The Beat: What do you like to do on the outs, besides loving your family? We bet it hurts being down, when the world outside is moving on.

Both Sides of the Bars

I don't know which is easier-life in the outs, or life in Juvy. I guess it goes both ways. I've spent most of the last three years in juvenile hall and I think it's both difficult and easy. It's hard because you can't do what you want, you can only do certain things at certain times, you can't even use the bathroom whenever you want. But then again, it's easy. You don't have to do thing own your own. Life in the outs is also both hard and easy. Hard because you have to make decisions on your own, but easy.

-Z

From The Beat: Sounds like your torn between which is easier. Why is having your freedom so hard?

My Thank You's

First of all, I would like to congratulate our new president, Barack Obama. And second I would like to thank God for being there for my every day living. And last but not least, I would like to thank my dad for putting his time in to come and see me also. I would like to thank my sister for writing me.

For all out there, keep your head up!

-Lil' Uce

From The Beat: You are thankful, and you should be. What will really make your dad and sister happy?

Think Twice

And don't think that being in a gang is all games 'cause it's not. That's why when you're in a situation where you're gonna get jumped in think twice 'cause there's no turning back.

-Keeping It Real

From The Beat: You're right - being in a gang isn't a game at all. It's a dangerous thing that will lead to prison or death. That's certainly worth thinking twice about.

Free Is Better

I think that life on the outs is a lot easier than being locked up when you are on the outs you have to work for everything. But, you can do whatever you want.

When you are locked up they give you everything that you need, but you are stuck in a cell. And all the emotional stress to me is worst than the stress that you go through on the outs.

-Bre

From The Beat: We can't imagine the emotional toll that incarceration brings to you, as well as others. We all know how stressful life is day to day, but to bring incarceration into the picture brings so much more pain.

Obama Is OK

Well, I think having Obama as a president is okay. I think he is going to change the laws and make everything a little better. If Obama don't, he going to get assassinated.

My brothers and cousin are in a gang and I think that I got into it a little bit, and I count myself as something like a gang member 'cause I kick it with them. I'm counting myself as a gang member 'cause I help them out and claim something myself. I haven't been jumped in yet but it's kind of a tradition in my family.

I didn't find the reality I expected but I started to get along with different people. What attracted me was having fun messing with girls, smoking bomb, drinking pisto and just partying like every day. I like my life a little but I don't like being locked up but I will when I have to do my time. Well me doing life in prison. I think it would be hard for me but I would be stabbing fools to keep myself alive and just try to sling and get money.

-Hristo

From The Beat: Here's a question: do you think politicians like Obama have any power to change things about life on the street? How do you think life will be different for you once you are jumped in? Also, how is your life in a gang similar or different to your life on the inside? One of our recent topics addressed the question of which was harder, life on the inside or on the outside—what do you think? Do you think you have more freedom as a gang member or as an inmate?

First Timer

It's my first time in the hall and dang, it sucks. I could see my house from my window, now I'm doing time.

They say I'm getting out soon. Hopefully my family don't forget they have a son. I've got a little sister that looks up to me, hope she doesn't do anything dumb to be in the hall. Got my girl waiting for me, hopefully she don't move on, she said she's going to wait for me now, all I can do is see if it's true. I miss my family and my girl, but I miss my sister the most and I know she is going to do better.

Ran out of words to say. All stay up, and do your time. In a blink of an eye, you'll be out and have fun. Late.

-P

From The Beat: Ouch, being able to see your house from the Hall has got to be rough, but that means you probably saw the Hall everyday of your life, too. Now, when you get out you can use it as a reminder to be good.

Better

Now, since we have a new President, I think our country is going to be better. It might take some time. I think Obama is gonna help us a lot just because he's going to help the Democrats.

-Young Demo

From The Beat: Word. All of your youngsters believing in Obama really helps insert hope into the heart of some of us old cynical people writing these responses.

If I Were a Dude

Hey Beat, what's up?

Yesterday I was walking down the hallway and I saw this fine-ass chick. When I got back to my unit I told myself that, that girl had a fine ass. That night I had a dream. I was dreaming of girls of course. (I say no more on this subject). Anyways, that's all I got to say peace.

-Ricky Rick

From The Beat: We love that you really went there and tried out the topic. It seems like a pretty accurate assessment. Boys, what do you think?

I'm Down

Hey Beat it's me S! So what's up, how has everybody been? I'm okay—well, today's topic I am going to write about is gangs, sets, and hoods.

Me, I've been in the set about two years and the way I started was my dad, he was a rival and he was telling me that I wasn't a gangbanger, so I told him no, I am, and now my hood has regulations—we can't do no drugs that get you addicted, and why I am in this hood 'cause that's all I had when I was about to get jumped and then we just started smashing on them. I also started 'cause my mom's side of the family is all homeboys and that's why, so I had no choice. I didn't care, I am banging to the fullest, I am down. I love my family.

-S

From The Beat: It sounds like your family makes this a complicated issue for you—it must be hard to have your mom and your dad on opposite sides of the fence, so to speak. Do you think they had different ideas of what they wanted you to grow up to become? What does "banging to the fullest" mean to you—what do you want to be good at more than anything else? If you've now been in the set for two years, how do you think you'll feel about it two years from now?

These Streets

These streets are so deadly and cold
That I don't see myself over twenty years old.
The reason for that life I'm leading
I won't give up until I'm not breathing
I'm gonna strive and represent until I drop
I'll do my best to bring us to the very top.
Most don't see it but we're against all odds.
We gotta drop the weak and all the friends
But I gotta stay firme and abstract minded.
Even when my enemies think they got me surrounded.

-Pancho

From The Beat: Tell us what you think it means to make it to the "very top." Is it worth dying for before you're 20? Maybe a longer life will be more rewarding than a short one that ends in pain.

Appreciate Mr. P

If I can be a hall counselor, I would like to be Mr. P. He is one of my favorite staff. He'd let us stay out for long periods of time, hooks it up with extra grub. Every so often when the unit is doing well, and there are no problems between staff and minors. He pays for a BBQ, and we'd eat pretty fat. The thing is...some people take his kindness for weakness. But if everything is chill he's chill. That's how I would be if I was a jail counselor.

-Social D

From The Beat: Mr. P sounds like someone we'd get along with as well. He seems to be a kind, generous, and easygoing person who likes to celebrate the positive.

Before I Was In One

What I believed about gangs before I became affiliated with them was that I was gonna get protection from my enemies and that being in a gang was only about kicking back and having more friends.

When I joined this lifestyle I noticed that it wasn't what I expected it to be. The biggest surprises after I entered this lifestyle were that before you jump in a gang you had to. To be continue...

-Timo

From The Beat: Wow, you really left us hanging there! Your description tells us that the reality of gang life is definitely different than the ideals of kicking back and always having protection, but you don't tell us how—we guess we'll just have to stay tuned.

Returning To The Hall

Look, a distraction!

Well, I'm back.

I said wasn't going to come back, but I'm here. I was at my group home for over four-months. The funny part is it was only a six-month thing.

-J-Kat

From The Beat: That's not so funny. We aren't laughing and we bet you aren't either. Knuckle down, get busy. You deserve a good life. You won't find it in the hall, or in prison. Get serious. Start reading. Pay your debts and get on with it.

Protecting My Sister

What's with The Beat? Well today I'm not feeling this topic so I'm gonna write a little about my sister.

She is 17 and I love her because she's been with me through thick and thin. She's my sister and if something happens to her I wouldn't forgive myself, and I hope nothing happens to her. I love her and every time I used to go walking with her somewhere, there would be these dudes that would start checking her out, and I felt responsible to protect her so I started telling them shhh, I would be like "what the hell are you looking at!" and my sister would get so embarrassed that I wanted to protect her more.

Now that I'm locked up, she doesn't have anyone to protect her and I feel worried. Well that all for today.

-Jose

From The Beat: Thanks for writing from your heart—we want to remind all you Beatniks that you don't ever have to write about the topics (although we try to pick ones that will interest you) if you've got other stuff on your mind. With that in mind, we're really interested, Jose, in what you've written about your sister and how you want to protect her. How do you think she wants to protect you? Do you think there's any chance that she's just as worried about you in here as you are about her out there? How can you and your sister support each other even when you can't be together? It's so important to have the people who are with you through thick and thin, who love you no matter what—what could you do to make sure she knows you're thinking about her?

The Streets

Well what's up to The Beat. It's the homie Lil' Osito. Well today what I'm going to write about is the streets. Well what can I say? I missed the streets because I am always out there chillin' in the most dangerous parts of the city. I want to be a vago and chill in the calles.

-Lil' Osito

From the Beat: What is it about being a street boy? Is it just the excitement and adrenaline from being somewhere unusual? Or is it because you are with your homies, which in the end will make you fall?

Missing Out

I am missing out,
my girl is pregnant.
I am missing out.
my baby is born.
I am missing out.
my baby crawls.
I am missing out.
I missed out on
everything, now
my baby don't
know me...

-Young Dad

From The Beat: But the great thing about babies is that they don't judge or hold grudges, you can easily be there for the next 50 years of this baby's life and they won't even know you weren't around for the first year. Make it up!

Drug Abuser

I am a pot head. I love going to school to learn, and there are hella girls, and I like seeing hella girls because I meet new girls and it get old having the same girls. I love smoking weed, coke, crystal—I love it because I need it because I will lose it if I don't have it.

I go to work because I need to pay my fines for court. I need to pay rent and my clothing so I will look cool, my bro to help his fines. And he get to know tats and pricing and what to buy.

-Antolin

From The Beat: We have to hand it to you, we don't often hear from young people who love going to school to learn. We do, however, hear from a lot of young people who experiment with drugs. What have you learned from doing drugs—good and bad? How have you dealt with not having the same access to drugs on the inside? Have you "lost it" like you were afraid you would? We want to learn more about you, and how you envision quitting, so you don't hurt yourself further.

This Life

Well I'm going to talk about the gang life. I'm not the only person in my family who is a gang member.

I have three older carnales who are gang members. We all represent the same thing, but we're all from different varrios.

Well I like being a gang member because that's all I knew growing. Homies in mi canton just chillin and partying all day long.

-Kollmero

From The Beat: Did one of your family members introduce you to a gang, or did you make that decision on your own? Do you think that everything your family does is right? How hard would it be to break away from this tradition?

Running

Whenever I go on the run, I always stop and think that I'm going to get caught eventually, but when it comes down to it, I rather deal with my problems later than sooner.

-F-dub

From The Beat: Hmmm this sounds like procrastination. Unfortunately, this is a very common habit amongst the human species.

Barrio

I am brown but being black or white is fine
But being brown is where I'm found
Holding my fist up in the air
Showing that I'm Chicano
And that I don't care
The barrio I now live in forever
To give for ever to stay
But one day when I reach my goal
I will have the future between my soul
Right now I ain't got much
But I got my pride
That's more than any other
Percentage in my side
Salutation to all
Struggle against time
We stand tall
We never fall
We rise above all

-Lil' Ceasar

From The Beat: Being proud of who you are is one of the most important things a person can do. Don't sell yourself short with this gang b.s. Don't think that just because people expect you to be a certain way, that that is how you are destined to be. You can rise above anything, yet living this lifestyle you will fall.

2008 Election

What's up Beat, this is Junior coming from Gilroy.

Well, I'm gonna write a couple of lines because this topic ain't so hot.

Today's topic is about Obama. I think about Obama being president today—I think that it is good because Bush always wants to go to war and Obama doesn't want to go to war and wants to save our army. The bad thing about it is because he is black and he is our first black American president in the United States of America, and I think that he will get assassinated because there's a lot of racists out there, and Nazis are still there.

I think that it is good because our world is going to change from now and no more wars. Well, that's all I got today, so until pencil meets paper I'm out, lates.

-Brazwell

From The Beat: We think a lot of people are scared of exactly what you just described, that this young president with so much promise, who wants to end the war and bring our soldiers home, will be taken down by someone who can't handle the image of a black man in power. How do you think our world is going to change, and how would you most like to be a part of that change? We're looking forward to the next time pencil meets paper for you.

Back From LA

Well, I left on September 17. I was recently in L.A. in a group home and I loved it over there, but I ended up running away from the group home and staying with some homies from Pomona.

Then I got caught up and was locked up at Los Padrinos Juvenile hall in L.A. County for a week, and I got in a fight there, too. Then I got transferred over here and now I'm getting sent back down south, to San Diego and then I don't know what's gonna happen from there.

Rest in paradise Lil Downer, my ex boyfriend. I love you and I miss you, baby.

-Lady B

From The Beat: What we don't understand is why you ran if you "loved it over there!" Good luck down in SoCal. We hope you will do very well there.

Hood Life

I always knew what gang life was like since I was a younger b/c
Of the city I lived in.

All my friends growing up, their older brothers
Were out on the block flaggin their hood's colors
But as my friends and I grew older,
We are now the ones on the block
All suited up with all the girls and money
No one told me what to expect
You had to know all of this before you got jumped in
It didn't run in my family but I had a couple of cousins
bang before me
The reality is exactly what I thought it would be before I
was apart of it

I think the biggest surprise once it happened was
How little life means to any gang member
People do it for different reasons
Family, the area you live in, the cities or your homies
even
If you like money, more cars and girls
And having that sense of family outside of your blood
family

-Celph

From The Beat: Hmmm. You are telling us that gang life has a little something for everyone? Interesting, we are not exactly sold. What's the price that we'd have to pay? What's the trade off? Do you get all the money, girls, and sense of family with no drawbacks?

Stressin' Hard

What's up with it Beat? I'm not at all fond about the topics that they tossed us today so I'm going to talk a little about how I'm feeling. I'm going through some things right now and its not to easy for me but I have a cool roommate and a homie that I've known since the 3rd grade and best friends in 6th grade to help me out and keep me up in spirits.

I'm stressing 'cause this trip to hell this time cost me my family and my close friends. My parents disowned me and they never want to speak to me again. They also told the courts nothing but bad things about me. Also my lady and sister's b-day is coming is on Nov 16th, and I am not going to be out to spend it with them. Also my other sister's b-day is on Nov 20th, so I'm in here for that one too. I'm here for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years again. I was supposed to go with my lady on Thanksgiving to meet her whole family and now that is not possible.

She had not written me or answered my calls. I think I lost her. I am not all stressing about the time I'm doing because it's only 60 days and I deserve it but I'm stressing about the outside world. Because when you're locked up, time goes on, people move on, things change and that's basically what's going on.

I'm hoping my family will get over it because I will. Family is the thing that means the most to me. I'm nothing without my family. But I am going to be myself and do the same things I'm doing now because I feel I shouldn't have to change for nobody. Well I gotta go back to my little mansion, so I'll get back to you another night beat. Stay up to all, do your time and keep your head up.

-James

From The Beat: At the end, you gave up and ended with being defensive. You love your family and your girlfriend, but you think that you can earn their love and respect by telling them that you want to continue to do the same things? What does that mean? We would like to suggest that you look around...everyone changes when they grow into an adult, find their passion in life, start a family, or learn that the world and life is changing constantly. We hope you will change and change to benefit your future and your loved ones.

Twelve Hours

Ey Q-Vole Beat? Well it's Pancho from Gilroy once again.

Well all these topics are hella whack so I'm not going to be writing much. Anyway, I was out for about twelve hours before I came back. I don't really remember what happened but it was all bad. I came in with my homeboy that was on the run from a YA Alternative.

-Pancho

From The Beat: Although we were disappointed to see you gone from our pages, we certainly didn't want you back here so soon! Remember the excitement you felt when you were getting ready for your release? Don't throw that feeling away so easily the next time it comes around.

Why Girls Have It Easier In This World

I have to say that girls are easier to live in this world than boys because they are smarter then us and they get along easier with their moms and dads. Us, we are always getting kicked out of our houses, and we have to live in the streets, or look for somewhere to live and to eat. Girls, they have it easy in this world. And to all doing time, keep your head up.

-Grizzly

From The Beat: Interesting observation. Do you think the reason for getting along and having an easier life is based solely on "smarts"? Maybe it is wisdom, or patience, or tolerance? Whatever it is we think that the pressure on a young person, male or female, who is not able to have a stable home-life is complex and also involves the ways parents, community, and peers treat the young person.

Family Tree

It's a gang-affiliated family tree,
We hereditary, strong branch and leaves
You don't start banging as a planted seed
But, when you growing and you're fertilized with what you see

Not tradition, rather you start doing what you lookin' at
Noticing that real cats gotta chase the rat
Always knowing other homeboys gonna have your back
Representing your section of your city map

Fell in love with watching those suffer,
Not put on! But affiliation is a part of me
Shouldn't blame the leaves from my family tree
'Cause you can't always do everything you see

-Jon Jon

From The Beat: So does gang-life essentially replace family life? Calling this a familial tie makes the bond more complex, which determines whether you are allowed to consider yourself an individual or part of this exclusive group. Although a person can't do everything that he/she sees, we wonder if having a gang-affiliation defines a person's identity, behavior...therefore a person loses their independence, autonomy by choosing to be part of this "family."

Family

Hey what up Beat? Well this is Lil'Silent dropping some interesting lines for all you vatos and Jainas.

Pues me personally, my own familia they're all from Los Angles. I've got uncles and cousins in South Central and in Orange County and some in the pinta and pues, I was raised in LA, but my Jefe had some problems down there and that made us move up here to San Jose.

Later on when I was 12 years old I got jumped in my varrio and since then I've been gang banging the way it should be.

I am proud of my family and homies 'cause we are always looking out for each other. Pues, that's all I have to say about me being in a gang and who ever reads this and don't like it well screw.

-Lil Silent

From The Beat: Basically this is how it is, tough shhh. OK, regret will be coming your way shortly, you'll see. For being a young fool who thinks this gagnsta life is it. Well, have fun living with the criminal justice system.

This Mentality

As a youngster homie military minded, brought up in this righteous way

From all this drama in the hood got to watch my back, stay on my toes it isn't good, The life I live got me stressing, Smashing through your block hella drunk about to rip shhh, Easing the pain while I watch you drip, Gone off the liquor still pushing up the bottle mane lock to the brain with two quetes in my holster, Can't stop banging when you're living the life This is my life trick can't nobody say shhh, Back on up before you catch me, This is my life, Don't know why that's just the way it is.

-White Boy

From the Beat: You write lines about being "hella drunk" and "watch your blood drip" and "stressing with a full clip" but then you end with "everybody die quick, don't know why." Can you really not see the connection between your previous words and the death that's coming at you? Don't be another fool, we have too many fools in prison, who deserve better.

Life

It's an everyday thing in my hood.
Times ain't good.
But I won't let my homies down,
I'm out to get money won't get left back.
I can't get me a job but I could get my split a dope sack.
In my hood every day getting my slang.
Not really trippin' the money 'cause I rather be gang
banging and kick back
with my homies who are down with me.
Don't push me 'cause I'm losing my head.
The way I live I might end up dead. Alrato

-Kollmero

From the Beat: There are plenty of former gang members who have secured jobs and positive futures for themselves. We think you have a chance to make this kind of future for yourself, also, instead of ending up dead. Remember, you have a choice in the matter. Don't sell yourself short.

Can't Help but Wait

I can't help but wait 'till I get out of jail. Jail is not the place to be. Was it meant for me to be here, I don't really know, yet it's easy like Sunday morning to come back to the hall.

I just want to get out of the hall and be with my family have time with them. Spend more time with my mom and sisters and nephews. To be the bigger man. I want to go back to school and get good grades just make my mother proud of me. I know she's proud of her son, but I want her to be really proud of me.

All right Beat, I'm gonna see you next week gone.

-The Good Son

From The Beat: The best thing you could do when you get released is go back to school and stick with it. Graduate. Once you do that, look for a job and work hard, and you can make it through college also. All these things will make your mom proud, and will improve your life.

Obama

Well, a little about Barak Obama! I am hella happy he was elected and I really think that it will bring real change. I think that there are gonna be hella good things.

I have 52 days left 'till I get out, thank God. I was thinking about the only king I know today and I can't wait till we're both out and can cruise in my whip. He gets out like a month after me and then we're gonna chill. I am hella excited to get out.

Well to all doing time, keep your heads up!

-Babyface

From The Beat: It's funny how this is "a little" about Obama and mostly about your and your man. But it's honest.

Trying Something New

What it do Beat! Right now I'm waiting to get shipped out to Wyoming. I really don't want to go but I got no choice.

What I'm doing is looking at the positives instead of the negatives and boy has that helping me out.

I mean I've never been outside California or to the snow, so this is going to be a life experience.

What I'm trying to say in this lil' piece is try something new. Even though you get second thoughts about it you might get something good out of it. I sure hope I do. Well I'm gonna be out this Beat 'till next time. Don't be a fool.

-Cyclops

From the Beat: Do you think that going to Wyoming will be a good thing for you? The reason the system sends you so far away is so that you'll break the bad habits that got you locked up. Do you think this form of treatment works, or will everything return to how it was once you get back?

A Different point of view

What's up Beat? This is Rodney.

One of these topics caught my attention when asked if I can put myself in someone else's shoes. I can put myself in my mom's shoes, always seeing her son in and out of juvenile hall and coming home hella drunk like 5 days a weeks when I should be at home united with my loved ones.

It's crazy because I think of all this stuff in here but when I get out none of this comes to my mind and then all I'm doing is chillin' back at the park cracking the 40 and tossing the cap on the floor by the bleachers.

You know fo' reals this homeboy's gonna stay out this time and strive to become the nurse that I always wanted to be

I encourage the home boys here to make the most of their time when they get out and just save the partying for the weekend because all of it will pay off sooner or later cause it will all still be there and also you'll have your own money for whatever boosts your high instead of you and the homeboys all putting your lunch money together to get the three 40's for five bucks.

Well Beat that's pretty much all I got to say so stay up. I know some of you are probably thinking who is this foo' trying to preach to me, and just to let you know it ain't preaching it's just advice so either you can take it or just leave it for the next.

So till next time I'm 'bout to pull the triggers and shoot this to The Beat so I'm out late!

-M.Jr.

From The Beat: It's good that you think of what consequences your actions have, not only on yourself, but also on your loved ones. You give a lot of good advice in this piece, and we hope that others listen to it, but we also hope that you take it to heart and remember what you said when you're out.

The Beat Within



Black

Live like you are dying
 I am dying
 But I sure ain't living like it
 My movement is impaired
 My brain is paralyzed
 Every breath feels mechanical
 Hair that is crumpled falls to dust
 Tick tock, tick tock
 Time's a wastin'!
 I don't feel like moving
 I got less than an hour today to breathe
 And salvage the sun's energy
 I can't move right now
 You want me to eat this shhh?
 Okay, fine. Bye bye
 Black

-Iownlife

From The Beat: You seem to be describing the death of your spirit, which can happen in juvy if you get discouraged and/or feel hopeless, more than the death of your life, but the two can be intertwined. Do you know when you're leaving? Will you go home?

I Need To Be Free

If they let me go home now, I would never come back. The police is some beezies. So they like to take black people to jail—that all they do. Ask somebody, they will tell you the same thing. Them police need to free me so I can go home. Them police!

-Ty

From The Beat: Do police like to take people, especially black people, to jail? Among police, there are probably many attitudes about arresting people, from those who try to manage a situation without making an arrest, to others who make huge efforts to put people in jail. Are there more black people, including youth, in juvy and jail, than they represent in the population at large? Look around you. Yes there are. What are all the reasons you can think of that creates this situation?

The Hood

I was raised and taught to keep my head up. The OGs in the hood taught me to never run from no ninja. The hood taught me to keep money on my mind and (beezies) on line. Keep my ninjas close and enemies closer.

I haven't been to my hood in eight months because I been runnin' from placement and getting thrown out from ROP. Hopefully I'll be home by Christmas. I love my hood. I love my ninjas and I love my prescription pills and my money. Don't free me, free yo' beezie.

One love. Keep ya heads, no talk situation, yee!
 All gas, no break, oh, and I love my mom!

-J Mak

From The Beat: You've learned a lot from your homies in your neighborhood, but have they also encouraged you to make it in the outside world? If you've been running young women ("beezies") on line" don't you think you should stop disrespecting them, getting your cash from them, and seriously get a real job? Take your own advice and free your beezies. You write that you love your mother. Does she know how you make your money? If you want respect, you need to get busy living a legit life.

A Chance To Change

A chance to make something or hope to be something: I wish amazing things instead of negative things that's not gonna help our poor economy. We change each other each day. We all need a chance to change.

-Fly

From The Beat: Now in juvy, or when you go back home, how will you change? What do you want your new life to be like? What will you have start or stop doing, to make your life the way you want it?

How I Started Banging

When I was a little kid I will always ride my bike down the streets. At the age of five, 'cause I never had a father there for me and my mom will always work until one in the morning 'til 12:00 at night.

Yea, my mom would always leave me at the house, 'cause she couldn't afford a babysitter. But, yea, that's when I meet older people than me and people started feeling bad, 'cause I was only five years old and my mom never know I was in the streets—that's when someone tried to take me under their wing, but he died, 'cause he was deep inside the gang.

That's when I started getting older, I meet this other guy that came from CYA, and I started to hang out with him. When I was a young teen and he was 27 years old and he started teaching me about gangs—how we got beef with this rival. But the guy who started takin' me under his wing when I was five represented the wrong color that my homie represented, the guy from CYA, but I didn't care. So that's how I started banging.

-Baby P

From The Beat: Good story about your young life. It's so sad that your mom had to leave you alone and you were so lonely you hit the streets. Did you ever tell your mom? You don't write about your adventures out there, what you witnessed, what you were involved in, what hurt you, what gave you joy, what you learned, so next time, if you want, why don't you write more details about your life as a youngster in your gangs? Does your mom know now that you pretty much consider your crew part of your family?

Freedom Again

On December 8th, I'm out of this joint. I'm going home. When I get there, I'm going to have all the fun I can. I will still be on lockdown, 'cause I'm going to be on an ankle monitor. I'm not going to get in trouble again, because I would like to stay out of this place.

I would like to go back to school, get a high school diploma, and go to college some day. I also think that teens should have the right to vote, 'cause we're on our way to adulthood and our vote should count just like all the adults'.

-Reese

From The Beat: Beautiful. Go home, stay out of trouble, finish high school and be sure to go to college. You're obviously very bright and like to think. Maybe you can use your sense of what is and isn't fair, like youth not being able to vote, and get work that will help change the voting age and other things you care about to help the people you love and for the youth coming up behind you.

I Love It A Lot (Firme)

I love life. It's firme! When I be on the outs, I think about comin' back. I feel safe when I'm here so I can't leave it no more. I want to ask if they will adopt me here, because it's firme to stay here. Just thinking about leaving makes me want to cry, 'cause I'm a miss this and that just ain't firme.

I like to go to el bano a lot. It's firme to go pee. Please don't take me away from my home, (Marin County Juvenile Hall.) I think back on the all the firme times I had in here and it makes me want to shed a tear.

I hope so good my parents doin'! I play wit' the snakes and use them as ropes. I also like to put frogs on my head for good luck. When I go home, I hope to play with my cat in the hat, with my shorty from across the streets. It's firme, don't forget that, ok? It's a nice!

-Chub

From The Beat: This is the first time you've ever written a satire, and it's so funny. If we here at The Beat hadn't read your other essays about how you so hate being in juvy, we'd almost take this story seriously, and that's the challenge of a great satire!

A Righteous Rebel

Momma, I love you to death for raising me the right way and always having my back, despite what drug court might say about my character. Eternally I am there for you and always have you in mind when I cross barriers. Your son's a rebel but righteous at every level, considered by some a devil for constantly using.

-Dyno

From The Beat: If your character gets dissed in drug court, how does that make you feel? Do you learn from what others think, even if you don't agree with their assessment? Do you defend who you believe you are? Do you just blow it off what they say about you? How does your mom deal with your being in juvy?

Gang Members Are Regular People

I believe gang life isn't a good way to live, but it's reality. I know a lot of gang members and they're just regular people trying to live.

-J Rocc

From The Beat: That's an interesting observation. Essentially it's true that gang members are regular people, although once they've joined a gang, they are required to carry out missions their leaders order.

Outs vs In

Yo – well, I'd rather be on the outs, with my family and my crew. You see, me and my crew just kick it and live with it and ball with cool cows. My friend brings the smokes. We ain't got no dank, so we can't get baked. Just us and the cool cows. Yo. 'Til next time.

-W

From The Beat: Sounds like you have yet to experience the joy of hard work, W. And it will keep you out of the hoosegow, too. Come on – get serious. It's the only life you'll ever have. Live it wisely.

Willie And Trevor Exchange Thoughts About Life On The Outs vs. Life Inside

Willie's view:

I think life on the outs is a struggle because you constantly worry about money, girls and what you're gonna do the next day. But when you're locked up you get three meals a day, you make phone calls at other people's expense and you already know what you're gonna do the next day. For example, I've been doing the same thing this month that I did last month.

Trevor's view:

Yeah, I am going to write about which is easier – life on the outs or life locked up. Well – here it goes... I think my bestest friend Willie is right and wrong, because if you make a living the righteous way from hard working, strong dedication towards your family, and you stay out of trouble – you won't have to worry about getting locked up. But if you continue to live a life of troubles, it's gonna be a struggle. So, you can do whatever you think is right, Willie. I'm out, Beat.

-Big Bc

From The Beat: We're with you on this one Trevor. Willie's right that it might be tougher on the outs, but the rewards for living a good life and working hard are well worth the effort, in our opinion.

Ridin' My Bike

I like to ride by bike and just fall off, because I love to feel the pain. It's firme and ahh... It's a nice!

-Kasper

From The Beat: Are you for real? Well, maybe your solution is to get out of juvy, go home, ride your bike and wipe out. You sure know how to have fun!

Freedom

They say we have freedom of speech, but how can we have freedom of speech when you can get locked up for some shhh you say to other people and the police?

-Freedom

From The Beat: In general, you are free to say what you want, but people don't have to accept whatever you say. If you disrespect someone, if you threaten them, there may be repercussions, especially if you get in a policeman's face. The legal issues may be ambiguous—police may arrest you for making "terrorist" threats, resisting arrest, etc. Maybe you should just do yourself a favor and think twice before you speak out.

Time Is The Real Distance

"Time is the real distance." This is a quote from a book by Jill Wolfson.

I could never go back in time. If I could, I wouldn't, because I've learned so much in life. I used to be the one who said things aren't ever going to change. But now I see the biggest change is in me. Since way back in elementary. Damn, that has been a while. People ask about me. They say: last I heard, he was put up for trial. Sometimes it's so hard. It's so hard for me to smile.

-Thinking

From The Beat: We have no easy answers for your dilemma. We urge you to be kind to yourself and kind to everyone you meet. There is always at least a small measure of solace, and the possibility of a smile or two, in any act of kindness.

Fantastic Week

Allow me to extend my love to The Beat. I am having a fantastic week.

The reason is, I got to see my little girl, for the first time. I was so surprised. She's in the best of health. She can walk. She's my hero – my daughter. I was so happy, once again. That was my high.

My low is that I'm still here and my next court date is around July of next year. It sucks, but I remain solid in what I do. I'm getting my GED and doing positive stuff to succeed in what I want to achieve. I'm working for my family – to help them up. I still am what I am and I do what I do. My mentality will help me succeed in life. Sincerely,

-Juan

From The Beat: We're so glad that you got to see your daughter. The work you're doing now – getting your GED and concentrating on your education – is an essential part of helping to make her world a better place. We understand that you are learning three new words a day. That's a great practice. The larger you vocabulary, the larger your income is likely to be. Many studies have noted the relationship between vocabulary and income. Stick with it.

So Feel My

This some mob ayyyyy!
 This some mob ayyyyy!
 This some mob ayyyyy!
 Three, two, one go!!!
 Strangers say I look soft but I'm more like uh boss.
 Got problems with me you might just get lost.
 Just like uh memory cause I'm hard in these streets.
 So don't mistake me for uh sucka in these streets.
 On every damn week ain't lookin' for no beef.
 But foo's test me must think I'm so sweet.
 So my goons ready to get active on the beat.
 In my hands ready to use any magic key.
 If you don't believe me.
 I did it once twice you can be number three.
 That's on yo life see I'm the best there ever is.
 Wanna compare fo'real yea that's uh big risk.
 Mainly cause you tryin' but I been doin' this.
 From the bay Oakland cali don't ask what is.
 Tryna smash please you'll straight get this bizz.
 So when you reminisce betta ask about me.
 Cause I come mob deep yea I'm a masterpiece.
 So feel my, feel my realness./ So feel my, feel my audacity.
 So feel my, feel my, loyalty./ So feel my, feel my, authority.
 So feel my, feel my, just me in I'm bout that action b so don't test me.
 Yea I'm all fancy so people ask me.
 So many crazy things but it's really not uh thing.
 Cause they don't really know what the def of fancy mean.
 Let me break it down A! for it get real extreme.
 Expensive extraordinary more than what it seems.
 So if I look soft look twice I be clean.
 Most that ask crazy things uh nonentity.
 Plus ask do I care if it aint about no green.
 Wait stop! Uh, uh, uh,
 In I'm gone doin' it some think they on me.
 I'm like ha okay, ain't even been to Italy.
 Why some hate on me 'cause I live fabulously.
 With the diamonds in my grill when I smile you'll see.
 Maybe 'cause they tryin' but live in poverty.
 Tryna stunt real hard with fake accessory.
 Then criticize me that's why I be abruptly.
 But the real feel me and that's obviously.
 So feel my, feel my, realness. So feel my, feel my, audacity.
 So feel my, feel my, loyalty. So feel my, feel my, authority.
 So feel my, feel my, just me in I'm about that action b so don't test me.

-Lil Nite

From The Beat: Well honestly Lil' Nite we're not so into competitive fronting. We like what you write off the top in the workshops a lot, and understand this kind of writing is a tradition...and still.

The Army

What's up Beat? Well I'm not feeling these topics today so I'm gonna write a little about me today I just found out that some army recruiters are coming in today I'm excited because I'm trying to get my life together, an I think the army is just the place for me. And after the army I'm going to be an x-ray tech.

-Josh

From The Beat: We wish you the best. We know folks who've gone into the army, and then went on to college. Take care of yourself. Learn, and listen to yourself and your own heart as well as what you're told.

Song

Hey girl how you doing my name Desean, I was wondering if I could take you out show you a good time invite you to my house here is my number girl you could call me but don't forget it babe the name Desean.

With all this love and kindness what am I doing single? Man I just tell myself man you don't have to be alone. If you need some one to love being loving is kind of hard to find, some one to trust with all this time I'm going to introduce my self now I'm addicted to this club and might as well

Hey girl how you doing my name is Desean and I was wondering if I could take you out and show you a good time invite you to my house here is my number girl you could call me anytime don't forget it babe my name is Desean.

-Desean

From The Beat: Have you ever tried to talk to a girl the way this song suggests? How does it work out?

All I Got Is My Boys

For a long time I been wit my fam. Really just two of my cousins and my older brother but then we also made friends that was real cool. We're all cool with are friends, family and all that.

Some of us went to jail together and a lot of other things we been through a lot though. But they had my back and I had theirs. And I can still look to them for help and I know they will be there for me. So that's why I can say all I got is my boys.

-Looking to them

From The Beat: We're glad you have good friends. Can you be there for each other, help each other and be family to each other without doing illegal activity, and risking jail or prison? This is what good friends do. We don't have many of them but they stay with us throughout life—without any crime whatsoever.

08 Election

Was the business! I wanna talk about the election and Obama being elected. My hopes is that Obama can get us out this economic crisis were in. If he could do that he would be the first African president who made a big difference and fixed this crisis.

-Carlos

From The Beat: We have hopes he can help us out as well. He is setting up to start in January, and we can't wait to see his ideas in action.

Hood

I really don't know too much about any gangs but where I'm from we just bang hoods, whatever street you were born and raised. So that's what you rep. Not too many black people claim colors but I think it's worst for hoods because there's so many and some got past history, but from what I know there isn't no getting jumped in unless you a blood or a crip.

But yeah me and my boys just chill we don't try and start nothing but we will finish it. I never even thought about what made me start claiming I guess when you get older you just realize where you're from and who your partners are so you could respect it or neglect it and that's for the hood.

-Quany

From The Beat: What would happen if you did "neglect" it when you are released? What might happen if you don't? Since you've been locked up what have you decided about how you want to deal with this in your future?

Askin' For Another Day

When I started to get into gangs I saw my dad and what he did. This is when I was in the 6th grade, that was years ago. I wanted to be a gang member. I liked the clothes, dickies creast up, nice cars, slap, getting respect. When I went to the 7th grade it all started for me, I started kicking it.

I got kicked out of school that year. Then I started getting locked up, putting work in. Getting tune-ups for mistakes or to help me get stronger. Even started smoking cig's and mota. I had fun. Everybody got treated the same.

We were family--I also got pushed away by my mom's family before this. So really didn't have no one but the boys. Moms and dad didn't really care they were doing some other stuff that I didn't like. The people I choose to kick it with had the same problems or been through it. They were the ones there for me, they had my back and I had theirs.

I experienced a lot of stuff that most don't. When I was hungry or needed clothes they hooked me up. Needed a place they hooked me up and I did the same. I'm locked up now I been down for bout six months and get out in four. My boys are checking on the fam that's why I love them so much. It's good knowing there doing that, my dad's locked up too. Mom's changing they're helping her out for me. Can't wait to see them again and kick it. My life with them might of got me in a lot of crime. But I'm not mad that I got in trouble with the law

I wonder what I be doing even if I didn't get in this fast life. But right now I ain't trippin' just asking for another day. God put me in this situation to make me prepared me for the future. One day I might change my life but god only knows that. You know it's just my life living in Vacaville.

From The Beat: It sounds like life has been rough, "tune-ups" all around. If you weren't in this "fast life" what would you like to do? Now that you have a minute it's worth it to think about it. Do you want to follow in your father's footsteps? What do you mean your mother is changing? Who would support you if you decided to quit this "fast life?"

Old Plans for New Ones

Where I been, locked down and creating sin
So much hard, I'm still with The Beat Within,
Trying to change my old plans for new ones
It's going to take knowledge to stay successful
I've been away from home for 5 years
I was in the "y"
Learned not to go back there or here

-Anthony

From The Beat: We've talked to you Anthony and it seemed like you're pretty straight about what you need and want to do to get yourself to a better life. We wish you luck!

Out them Gates

What's up Beat? I got a chance to get out the other day for a few hours. It felt real good to get out them gates an be able to do what I wanted to do for a change.

I got to see my sister an got a chance to kick back with my bro's. it was like dejavu of a couple of months back. To be honest I'm kinda tired of all this I didn't even want to come back, but shh all good time aint shh but another number on the clock you dig. Aight Beat I'm out get at you later.

-Young Hick

From The Beat: Glad you enjoyed your freedom. Work for it.

Get Out Early

I am from Vallejo and in the juvenile hall in Fairfield. I fell in life 'cause the way I was raised. I hope most of you know that it's crazy in the world, most of my friends are doing 18 years to life right now. I am looking at one year in Fouts.

I hope to do a good program to get out early from the boot camp so I can help my family at their job so we pay their rent and for my friends that passed away rest in peace and much respect.

-Juan

From the Beat: Good luck on your goal to do a good program and get out early. Don't go the way of your friends doing 18 to life. You can live life legit, it may be challenging—but doesn't involve prison.

My Thoughts

Wassup Beat this D. once again writing ya'll. Well as for me I didn't join shh. I been with my ninja's all my life. We move mean all day. Posted on the block, doin what we do best. Getting that money, and havin fun. Keep it mobbin all day everyday.

I mess with all family no friends. Otha people is only associates, strictly business. I'm down for my hood. I been doing time since a very young age. I'm still doing time and ain't ready to change. You gotta respect it, cause you aint gonna disrespect it. Stay true to the game. I'm always ready for whateva. When I do time, I just think how I'mma do it better next time.

-Curious George

From The Beat: Well you say you been doing time since a young age, so even if you can "do it better," it still seems like better is not enough to stay out of jail, or prison. Prison is full of people who didn't think they would get caught. What about yourself and your life would be worth developing (to you) if you did decide to change?

Don't Judge

I think having a black president is good for the country. Why I say that is because it gives African American's a chance to be not feared. Also because majority of the people of the United States think that Black people are all bad people and always have to do wrong. but that's not true, so I'm glad that Obama won so he could show people that judging people is not right and show people that they made the right choice for electing him.

-James

From The Beat: He has a lot of responsibility doesn't he? It seems hard to have to teach everyone not to fear others, but we agree and hope he can help people to see past their fear.

Before You was Even Born

My hood is out here in Fairfield. Man it's a war zone out here but I ain't tryna run or leave. I wanna be in that war zone and just kick it with my ninja's and put in work. Two more months and I'm right back out there where I started at and it's not getting no better just worse.

But what are you supposed to do when you grew up around the hoods or your family that you never even met is dead? It's like you already get a bad life before you was even born. I ain't tryna get out though I'm just tryna not to get caught no more. And I'm young and lil' so I'm jus getting started in the war zone.

-G

From The Beat: Read what other people say on this topic in this issue... most who have been fighting in this "war," would have left if they knew really what they were getting into. Most feel they didn't have much choice...however some people in the same difficult situation do not go down this path—so it must be possible to find another way.

For A Reason!!!

Life is hard when you grow up different from everybody else and even harder when you see people who have nice cars, big houses and just has a lot of money and you can't do nothing but wish that you had it like they do.

You see it's people that have a good job, fancy suits, and look all professional and make a lot of money to get all the good things that they have and they love what they do-- and there's people that don't have a job, don't have fancy suits, and don't have a lot of money because they have to sell drugs-end up going to jail and they do wrong things but they love what they do because it's the best thing they could do.

The person that has a good job tells the person who sells drugs and does wrong things that he should change and the person who sells drugs didn't listen so he ask the guy who sells drugs why didn't you listen to me and the guy who sells drugs say because I love what I do.

So the guy with the good job says oh ok and walks away the next week the guy who sells drugs tells the guy with a good job that he should change and the guy with the good job doesn't change. So the guy that sells drugs wonders why the guy that had a good job doesn't listen so he asks the guy with a good job why didn't you listen to me and the guy who has a good job says because I love what I do so the guy that sells drugs says oh ok and walks away.

The point to this story is don't try to change someone because they do what they do for a reason even if it's good or bad.

-Young Rell

From The Beat: Yeah, we see what you're saying. We see a lot of young people locked up though, who we like and who we think could have happier lives. We also care about our own kids and the communities we live in. It's not okay for people to hurt each other, even if they have a reason, no matter what kind of job they have.

Messed Up life

Well right now I'm in JDF that is the juvenile hall I been here for 48 days now I hate it here but the best thing to do is run the program and learn from it don't be a dummy and think positive and think of a way to do right when you get out of here.

I been in here 48 days and I still haven't even started my 120 day sentence. But the worst thing is I'm a be 18 in 2 months and my mom and dad left me to sit in here as they moved off to Texas so when I get out I'm a be on my own. It not worth trying to be cool and getting in trouble when you can do right and have money in your pocket.

-D

From the Beat: We think, from talking with you, that you have some good plans in place for where to go, and a job and support. Use your time inside to read and write, study and get yourself clear and strong.

Serving Life In Prison

If I was serving life in prison, I would ask somebody that I knew on the outs and tell him or her to find out all the numbers to with all the people I had beef with and tell them I apologize. Then I will call a priest and tell him to come and bless me and forgive me for all my sins. That's what I would do if I was serving a life sentence.

-Lu

From The Beat: What would happen if you just did that now? Your life is worth it now right? Even if you don't have life in prison you could benefit from clearing the air with anyone you've beefed with, and by forgiving yourself as well. Why wait? Your life is more important than a life sentence right?

The Promise

I was told about gangs at a very young age. I was raised around gangs. My dad told me everything about it. There were no surprises for me because I already knew.

I wanted to be like my dad so I did the things he did. I was just like my dad when he was young. Going to jail doing bad things and always on the block. People always say I'm just like my dad. If you scared to go to the pen or get locked up then this aint the life for you.

I was raised by my dad and all of the OG's from my hood. They laced me up right. But they also told me I could end up dead or in the pen facing 25 to life. But I'm going to continue to live like this. But for some advise if you scared to do time then I think you should find another life.

I know right from wrong but I do what I do. Don't think this life is going to be easy way out because it's not real talk. Well that's what I got to say today.

-Bay Star

From The Beat: We understand that you care about and respect your Dad. He taught you what he knew. Now you have learned about other ways of life as well, so you have more of a choice. We hope you have met and watched other men who you also respect, and check out how they've decided to live their lives. How do you feel about your Dad being locked up? We don't think you want that for him, or he wants that for you. What if you have a son? Take the time to think about what are the reasons behind deciding to "continue to live like this." Do you think if you changed your life your Dad would still respect you? We hope he'd want you to have more opportunities than death or the pen.



Goon Life 4 Ever On Blocks

I aint tryna change I'm a keep it real ya'll could take me off the streets but the beast wasn't part of the deal. I'm a always hold my ground neva leave the battle field only a real goon can understand how I feel.

One thing I found out is that life aint fair got my young ninja the pin doin' life up there. My time is running out I'm almost gone cause my life is on the edge an I'm barely hanging on.

-Young Keak

From The Beat: We are sorry about your friend doing life. You're right life isn't fair, however that doesn't mean we should just give up. It might take a while to figure out how to go legit, but we're sure you could get a job, and keep it if you were persistent and decided your life is worth the effort.

Dear Beat

For me growing up it was like I had to gang bang because of who my family is and how they bang and I felt like I had to live up to my family name. It was like since they is known all through the city then me being a family member then I had to be known also. So I was bangin' also.

But then I moved and started hustling and found out that if I wanted to make money then I couldn't gang bang because it would mess up my clientele. So I just stopped not selling to people just 'cause I didn't like them. I just took their money and told them to call me later. So that's why I stopped banging.

-The Curb

From The Beat: So now you need a good job so you can stop hustling. You've had a huge education, though not all in school. Put your knowledge to work, and find out what you can achieve.

Stressful

Ain't got nothing to talk about everything is personal I am going thorough a lot! I have so many things running through my mind they're all stress full.

I am tired of worrying I'm tired of stressing I'm tired of wanting but can't have I'm tired of situations that are out of my hands and all I can do is stress and Hope!

Hope is a big part of my situations that's all I can do is stress and hope everything will fall in place the way I hope and stress they would!

-Remy

From The Beat: You describe how life is for many people, because none of us know what will happen. The most we can do is set it all up as best as we can, and take care of ourselves.

Good Choices

I'm from Vallejo, my name is Tony, I'm in Solano County juvenile hall, and I just got out from Fouts springs. I did 15 months and now I'm back in juvenile hall for a warrant. Hopefully this time I get my mind straight and don't return back to juvenile hall. A lot of my friends are facing a lot of time for a crime they committed. Hopefully I make good choices in life.

-Tony

From the Beat: Don't just hope, make the decision you won't return to Juvenile Hall, and that you are committed to making good choices. You can do it! You know what the consequences are if you don't. Believe in yourself.

Hitta Lick

This one time me and a couple of patnas were walking down the block and we seen this one big house it was a nice color. A green two story house with stairs that go up and down.

I told my friends let's kick the door down they said alrite so "boom" kick the door down me and all my patnas ran all up in the house.

After we left the house we went back to my place and split everything equal ways but next thing you know the po po's came in-but half got away me and like 4 of my patnas hit my back fence and starting getting ghost.

The next day I got blurbed for having some dope on me, I went to jail got out started fresh again.

-Lil T

From The Beat: How do you like being locked up? Is it worth giving your life away to have some fast money, or stuff that isn't yours? How would you feel about yourself if you worked and earned the money and things you have. You can do it.

Life gets Harder

Wassup Beat, Well this yo boy Joey once again. Only nine more days to go now. I've been waitin' for that day to come so I can get out this place. I learned a few things from being in here. These last 7 months of my life.

What I learned was when you grow up life gets harder. What I mean by that is you got to take care of your own responsibilities. Other than that time went by quick some times, and time went by slow some times. The staff here is cool. Some times they be in a bad mood because some kids in here, then they take it out on the whole group. But it's cool cause I'm out here next week!

-Joey

From The Beat: Good luck Joey. We do have to take care of our responsibilities, and it's good to keep it simple as possible. First responsibility is to your self and your life, take care of yourself, make careful decisions. Stay positive! After that, we advise taking it one thing at a time.

Hood Life

Before I became affiliated I didn't really think anything of being a gang member. I mean I had and still do have family that bangs. But I guess I just started kicking it more than I already was.

Then moved to Vacaville and got jumped in to my hood. You feel me I've been banging for years and I've been jumped into my hood for years. Well to me I do what I do for a cause. I hate how some now-a-days act like it's just fun and games and its cool to kick it and drink and smoke. But don't know how to handle business. I'm just going to say this. For you so-called ya'll could relax and kick it well that's all I got well for all keep ya'll head up and stay strong much love from the goof from Vacaville.

-Young Goof

From the Beat: What is the "cause"? Is this cause truly worth people's lives? Including yours? Please read what others say in this issue, especially those looking at some serious time.

Need To Change

What's good Beat me just got eight more days then I'm home bound. I don't know how I'm going to change myself it's hard I've changed a little bit but I still act out in a violent way like punching walls when I get mad and that scares my girl hella bad.

I don't know it's something I'm working on changing it's gonna be hard to do but my girl also needs to change-so wish us luck on trying to change. Stay up. Gone.

-Spanky

From The Beat: We do wish you luck and patience, and hope you know it's worth it to commit yourself to the hard work of life. Making these changes will bring you positive benefits. It's nice you have someone else trying to make life better as well.

Ice Cream Man Song

Hello children what would you like an fudge sickle or an ice cream with chips sounds good how bout a lemon lime there's so much to choose it hard to decide what about you boy what about an icicle or an ice cream that has funny little yummy candy that has great prizes how about a gusher that oozes when you bite I'll stop when you hand me the five then hit the gas and just drive by come on children don't come and hunt me I wont stop if you don't got money.

-Ronald Reagan

From the Beat: Hmm this is strange that you call yourself Ronald Reagan and you speak from the perspective of "the ice cream man." Is this all supposed to be a metaphor for something?

Mi Experiencia

Hola amigos. Con mucho respeto y con todo mi corazón. Les voy a contar mi experienciá. Yo era una persona un poco fuera del orden y mis amigos me llevarón a un punto de hacer drogas y por mis amigos llegué al punto de perdér mi libertad. Fue un dia 27 de Enero del 2007 que yo perdiera la libertad y en el tiempo que yo buscaba a mis amigos, no los encontraba. Ellós empesaron a tirarmé mas a la cárcel. En el momento yo pense y digo no hay amigos, cuando uno esta en la cárcel. Solo estan su mama y sus hermanos que lo visitan.

Los que yo creeá que eran mis amigos me han puesto en la carcel acusandome de una muerte y de un intento de muerte. Ya llegadó la hora de mi juicio y lo he perdido. Le pido a Dios que mi sentenciá sea un poco corto. El 14 de Noviembre es el dia de mi sentenciá y le pido a Dios que no sea tan largá mi sentenciá.

Y como yo les digo no se dején llevár por sus amigos y les aconsego esta hacieo una experienciá muy dura para mi vida. Solo tengo 17 años y mi vida esta un poco mas en la carcel, que en la callé. Escuchán a tus padres y serás muy grandé. Las reglás son las reglás. Y el que las rompé las paga. Que viván los que estamos presos por que sabemos pagar lo que debemos.

Y seguimos siendo vandoleros y pagamos el presio de la callé. Y cuando me setencia les voy a entregár otro poema es un Viernes 14. Les prometo el 14 de Noviembre del 2008 Hernan M. voy a seguir con my tumboado y con my ojos colorado por que ustedes me lo han dedicado.

Y con Dios en mi menté estoy bien acompañado, por qué Dios me ayudado y mi vida ha cambiado y solo dios me ayudo. El me acompaña por que solo el no se olvido por que Dios es grande jovenes. Por favór escuche sus padres y serán muy grandes en su vida. Este es mi mensajé.

My Experience

Hello friends. With great respect and with all my heart I'm going to recount my experience. I was a person who was a little bit lost and out of order. My friends took me to a point of me doing drugs and my friends got me to the point of losing my freedom. The day was January 27 of 2007 that I lost my freedom. In the time that I looked to my friends, I did not find them anymore. They threw me into the jail.

At the time I thought about it and I said there are no friends when one is in jail-- only one's mom and siblings who visit. The ones that I thought were my friends, have put me in jail accused of a murder and an attempted killing. I think about what I lost and I ask God that my sentence will be short. November 14 is the day of my sentence and I ask God to be a day not too long. Do not be left behind by your friends. This has been a very hard experience for my life with my being only 17 years old and my life is a little more in jail than in the street.

What I am saying is that listening to your friends will make you lose. Listen to your parents and you will be very great. Rules are the rules and the one that breaks them will pay. You gotta give it up for the ones that are locked up because we know that we pay whatever time we owe.

When I am sentenced I'm going to write another poem. I promise that on November 14, 2008 Hernan M. is going to continue with my burden and eyes because you have given me the chance to express it.

God helped me. My life has changed and only God helped me and stayed with me. I will not forget because God is great. This is going to help all of the young people. Please listen to your parents and you will be very great in his life. This is my message.

-Hernan

Blessings

Being locked up may or may not be a blessing
 But one day
 Always someday
 Everybody learn a lesson
 Keep on holding on to receive a blessing.

-Kevin

Our next group of writers are sending us their writing from all the way in Washington D.C. During a recent trip to Washington DC, we at The Beat Within had the privilege to go to DC Jail to meet the young men, who are tried as adults, who each week participate in the Free Minds Book Club and Writing Program, and during our visit we actually ran a Beat workshop. The following pieces are the end result from our guest workshop. It is the goal of Free Minds and The Beat Within to work together in DC to create a venue and a united program that our writers will feel safe to express their views to their peers and a wider audience. With that said, give it up for these young men as they spill a cup full of emotions over the pages of The Beat!

That Same Day

My mom, my doctor, that random officer
 My teacher, my grandma, my girlfriend
 All talked to me that same day
 Talked to me about change
 That same day
 I obtained a job, making good money
 I talked to my doctor with my mommy
 I met up with my teacher
 All on that same day
 Damn, all this on the same day
 On that same day, one mistake
 One charge, one sentence
 That could have been avoided by staying in
 That same day.

-Shaquan "Spida" B.

Never Again!

Never again will I make them old mistakes again
 Not now, not ever, most people just don't know when
 Never meant to end up in this situation, but here I am
 When I get out, I'm gonna stand up and take my ground
 Never to hang around them same friends I hung around
 While in here, it makes me realize things I never realized
 before
 Thinkin' about my mother, my heart pounds
 Against my empty body's floor
 Never again to ever hurt my peoples again
 Not in here, or out there
 'Cause I'm thinkin' about them within
 I got a child on the way, hopefully I'll have a daughter
 Hopefully I be there, 'cause without them
 My life's not in order.

- Lil' Anthony M.

New

As I sit in South Two
 Waiting for my court date to come
 I've been here eleven months
 But my time has just begun
 I'm tired of jail
 And I've learned my lesson
 This time when I get out
 I'm going to count my blessings
 Start with the new
 And end with the old
 'Cause my old lifestyle
 Has just been sold
 No more robbing
 No more banging
 I gave up the coke
 So no more slanging.

-Big Baby

SE Streets

Growing up in the SE streets of DC
 You never had peace
 There was always a fight and gunplay at night
 Sometimes even in the day
 But people didn't care
 As long as they got their share
 Of violence
 There could never be silence
 In the SE streets
 Walking in SE, you never felt your heart beat
 Your heart was froze or somewhere near your toes
 I mean you could feel it drop
 And rise back to the top
 Growing up in hood was tough
 No bluff
 Sure we were on the scene
 Don't be mean
 Sitting in front of one-two-

oh-one
 You never knew if it could be the day you were done
 Coming outside was no fun
 When you had to look back
 To see if you were 'bout to be attacked
 Cause in SE there was no rappin'
 You knew nothing 'til it happened
 If the person told you your head was going to be hit
 You ain't have to worry about shhh
 It was just a showboat
 And the person who said it Probably got locked up the next week
 And started droppin' notes
 Will we ever have help?
 To bring peace in the DC streets
 Other than the police?

-Dale

The Rain

So many tears fall from my eyes
 Too many questions and so many lies
 I made the mistake
 I fell in love with you
 I thought I was lucky
 One of the few
 I should have known it wouldn't last
 Feeling your love is just in the past
 People asked, "Can you stand the rain?"
 But now I can't
 'Cause it brings too much pain.

- Dobey

My Hood

My hood is a little place off East Capitol Street, called 37th Street. I have been hanging around there since I was a little boy. I have done a lot of things around there with people. I have robbed, stolen cars, beat up innocent people. I have taken things from my friends.

I have did those things because I was mad and dumb and I couldn't get what I wanted but now I know what I was doing was stupid. I've learned from my mistakes. My hood is something that was bringing me down. People in my hood that I thought was my friends is not really because when we got caught for our crime, they just snitched. When I go home, I'm going to stay away from them scared ninjas, but still do me.

-Rico

My Life Through the System

Never been through trial and tribulation
 Always a decent child
 Never thought I'd be in a cell going wild
 Redirected myself to sports
 Adapted to the girls and fast lifestyle
 Getting into trouble was never my style
 Leaving a football game all proud
 Never thought I'd be in a cell or with a crowd
 My life is beginning to unfold
 My life through the system is something to behold!

-Shaquan "Spida" B

I Will Never

I will never get so drunk that I black out again
 I have a drinking problem
 And it's hard to deal with
 Because I don't know how to pace myself
 I started drinking after my friend died
 To ease the pain
 And ever since then
 I've been a heavy drinker
 I drink before a party
 When I'm just hanging out
 Or to celebrate
 I like the feeling I get when I drink
 But sometimes I take it overboard
 When this happens
 I wake up and can't remember how I got there
 Or what I did the other day
 I like having other people have to tell me
 How I was lunching and how messed up I was
 But sometimes I can't help it
 Once I get them first couple of drinks in me
 I want more
 My mother was going to put me in a program
 But I didn't want to go
 I don't want to stop drinking
 I just want to learn to pace myself.

-X

All Lies

Dear Mr. President (Bush)
 You screwed up everyone
 Know you're the reason the twin towers blew up?
 Come on now
 People know you're just a cover up
 Ready to get on TV dressed in a suit and tie, just to lie
 Talking about this so-called plan
 Well if you call yourself the so-called man
 Why don't you tell these people how your father sold weapons to Iraq in Iran?
 But hold on, isn't these the same people you're at war with?
 Has your mind gone frozen stiff?
 Give these people answers
 Oh, trust me, I would spread no myth
 I thought you signed a bill of rights

No child left behind?
 In case you forgot, now I have taken time to refresh your mind
 'Cause I'm one of those kids promised not to be left behind
 One who has a very bad condition
 Went to a school for the handicapped
 Never knowing how to adapt to natural life
 All my life being placed in special ed-class
 Promised not to be left in the past
 Seems like Bush has turned his back and gave me a handful of his ass
 'Cause I have been left in the past
 I wonder, am I even in your memory?
 Or did you politely just say "screw me"

-Dale

Where We Used To Kick It

As long as someone is there
 It really doesn't matter
 But I wonder if they know
 That is where we used to kick it
 Most of our lives
 Were spent elsewhere
 But they were hardly complete
 Without that old, brown
 Picnic-table in the park
 Damita and Danny and Chris
 And me, and all of us
 We grew up there
 Our childhood birthday parties
 Were spent gathered
 Around that old, brown table
 And eventually we gathered around
 That old, brown table to party
 I went through it all with you
 That's where Lupe broke his arm
 ("Don't jump!" The adults practically dared him)
 And where Danny got his heart broken
 ("She's no good" we all tried to warn him)

Each of us spent some time alone
 With that old, brown table, too
 None of us could ever
 Have been such good listeners
 And what amazing stories
 That table had to share!
 We would run our fingers
 Over its surface
 And stop only to trace
 Each tale engraved into its mind
 It told us of war and peace
 Of loss and love...

It's hard to think of the next writer — our "old" friend Michael Cabral — being only 22 years old! In the long piece that follows, he captures the desperate loneliness that, despite all his best efforts, sometimes overwhelms him, as it must for all who languish in the cruel cells of prisons everywhere. And yet, refusing to allow those feelings to crush him, he rises again, like a Phoenix, to give us the wonderfully sweet poem about that old picnic table in the park where he kicked it, and where his fond memories take him. This is a man, not a boy, who shares with us both his deepest longings and his deepest joys from the belly of the beast at Salinas Valley State Prison in Salinas, CA.

I still wonder if "T" and "E"
 Really lasted "4-ever."

Often I look back and can't believe
 What a good friend
 That table was to us
 And what better friends
 It made us to each other
 If not for that table
 We may have never known
 Where anyone else was
 Probably we wouldn't have ever been alone
 But that table made it a promise in our lives
 I wish I would have never left
 For sometimes I look back
 And realize that a look back
 Is as close as I'll come to it again.
 But I am comforted
 (I'm smiling now, even)
 Because as I look back
 I know that some boy, some girl, some friends
 Are looking forward to another day of what life
 Should always be at that old, brown picnic-table in the park.
 Just like we did when we used to kick it there
 That table will never know loneliness
 And neither will those who trace its history.

Something As Simple As Love

Five years of this awful place is already behind me. It has gone both quickly and painstakingly slowly. But in both cases I have been so thankful every day to be a little bit closer to home, to freedom, and to the beginning of the life I should have started long ago. Yet, ever so often, days like the one I'm in now come along, and I can't help but get forced to the ground by the sheer pressure of the eleven years in shackles looming ahead of me still. Especially since at the end of those eleven years, my freedom is the furthest thing away from a guarantee. I'm relying mostly on hope and luck.

At twenty-two years old, I'm still a kid by most standards (most older guys around here refer to me as "that firme youngster"). So maybe I'm burdening myself with things I'm not even ready for. But I'm absolutely terrified by the possibility of living out the rest of my days, not only behind these walls, but also without ever knowing what it's like to be in love.

Throughout my life in the free world, I exchanged "I love you's with a few girls. I didn't (always) use those words only to get what I wanted from them, but I hardly knew what they meant. And at the end of the day when our fun was had and the next girl expressed interest in me, "I love you" was just a bunch of words. Actually, to a sixteen-year-old me, it was more like a "thank you for the sex."

Now, I'm left staring up at a bare cement ceiling wondering

what my life would be like if I would have lived it right from the beginning. I'm an amazing husband and a great father in all of my fantasies. I'm not very romantic, but my wife never wonders why she loves me. When I consider what my life might have been like if not for prison, I'm the kind of guy who just wants his family to be happy. I'm the kind of husband who knows who his wife is, and loves and respects every part of her. I know when to make her laugh, when to listen, when to kiss her. And I'm the kind of father who teaches his kids about right, wrong, respect, and self-respect, and I lead by example. I support them in every way. I constantly encourage them to be themselves, and I fully embrace whoever they become.

But it's just a fantasy. Prison is a part of my life, and I honestly don't know who or where I would be if things would have gone differently. I try to maintain the idea that one day I'll find out for sure the kind of husband and father and free man I am. (Hopefully, I'll always believe in love). Today, however, I'm scared that I'm only fooling myself.

Whenever I do allow myself to sink into these fantasies, the entire physical world around me fades away, and I'm finally in a place I wish I could stay forever. I close my eyes and become so involved with where I've taken myself in my mind, that even the emotions of the moment are real to me. My heart's beating quickens with excitement, my stomach knots from nervousness. My spirit soars with the thrill of pure joy.

continued from previous page

But eventually, I have to open my eyes again. And when I do, all those incredible feelings of what I assume happiness is, that were genuinely mine (even if they were make-believe), quickly disappear and are inevitably replaced with loneliness and a painful longing to be free (from prison, from the mistakes I made as a child, and from my loneliness). Not to mention, I feel completely ridiculous for fooling myself in the hands of a corrupt system that knows nothing about me.

Sometimes, I hear people speak of the possibility of finding that right woman from within these walls. I never mean to downplay the power of love, but the flaws really point themselves out in that theory. Who wants the hopelessness of being in a relationship full of wishes of something better, something more? I truly am on an emotional rollercoaster here, with highs anxiously hopeful for a decent life, and lows near succumbing to a futureless future wrapped in cement.

Sixteen-years-to-life was a lot to deal with when I was seventeen years old. Yet, I knew then that I would learn to cope with it. Now, I've been at it for a while, realizing every

day something else I'm missing, and it hasn't gotten any easier. The older I get (as ridiculous as that sounds) the more substantial and meaningful the life-things I long for become. My longings, in my incarceration, adolescently began for an ice-cold beer. Now, I dream of a home.

I don't know what more I could want, but I've a lot of time to figure it out. It scares me. If something as simple as love hurts this bad when I realize I'm missing out on it, my next fantasies can only hurt more. My next realization could be that I'm not missing anything at all. Then what? My low becomes my high and my high becomes my forever heartache.

Every day I struggle to do whatever it takes to get out of this place. And I have to believe I will. I have to believe that unknown woman I fantasize about, fantasizes about a life with me, too. It keeps me going. I even do a few extra push-ups every day so that when she does finally have me, she has the complete best me I can give her. A struggle it is, though. And, like I said, I'm scared. Maybe she is out there. But maybe I never will be.

KHALIL BENNETT

"Seek Your Teeth Into This: The Original Gangbanger", Volume #1

Between the 1500's and the early 1800's 'poor' Irish, Italian, African, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, English, etc., were sentenced to servant (slave) labor and transported unwillingly across the Atlantic ocean, mainly by the dominant fleets during this time. Which were Dutch, Spain, British and Portugal. History shows that the beginning era of slavery was not stable, thus leading to rebellions and escapes. The unfortunate individuals that did arrive at the plantations to serve their 6 to 12 or a flat 6 or 7 years of moderated unpaid (work) hold up for a moment!

Just how important is this word "work" here in this essay? I will show you as I go along. So follow me with an open mind and pay attention. Now once these slaves finished their sentence handed down to them by England and what not, the original "forty acres and a mule" was given to them if they wanted to stay in the new world (for them).

"North America," assisting other settlements with farming, trading goods, adventuring, etc. Though some left altogether, some went with the Indians-who were (working) without pay on the communal tip to keep the land that they cherished so much, cultivated. Not to mention: hunting, fishing, craftsmanship with blankets, sweaters, and so on.

What I'm about to highlight is another vital piece of this puzzle of gangs and the struggle overall. Practically at least one out of five of these ex-slaves eventually become slave-owners, overseers (slave watchers), slave catchers, vessel directors, vessel captains, and much-much more. Cause remember, how else does slavery expand land and participant wise? Everybody couldn't have played the role of a gangbanger. Somebody had to be the gang-task force!

Once again, how important is work, finances, income, commerce, production, imports and exports? Did some of these ex-indigent slaves feel as though they seized their economic opportunity and acknowledged themselves as a "working class"? Did any of the employers/employees of

Our next writer is writing to us from a Correctional Facility in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. He brings to us some very important and wise information. Khalil does a little a research and he puts together a great piece about gangs. Although he doesn't really talk too much about gangs, he mentions the slavery and a few origins of immigrants who also faced discrimination when they first came to the United States. Khalil brings up a good point because all of the races that have been oppressed in the U.S. are the same races that operate illegal gangs in the U.S.

slavery have to (work)? Let us clear the air for this right now. As much as I hate to recognize it, living in a white supremacy world as a black man basically everybody who participated in the start of the trains Atlantic slave trade as we know it-were linked to capitalism, a.k.a. small-time-workers rather de facto or otherwise as far as the ones who orchestrated it!

Taking the easy, yet contested route, would be to say, it occurred because we were "Black." Yeah, well why were there Portuguese, French, English, Irish slaves? Now that that's settled, let us move on to the 1840's when the first noted small poor Irish gangs in the slums of northern states surfaced. The majority Irish had been use to being oppressed, poor and ganging up, behind the bondage England placed upon them in Ireland for the last seven centuries. That is to say, the Irish were naturally adapted to protests, demonstrations and fighting. And actually helped the Americans beat the British in a battle in the mountains during the American Revolution.

Nevertheless, they didn't receive a piece of the "American Pie" after words! Post Civil war epoch, a lot of the defeated confederates organized their own gang(s) like the Klu Klux Klan, motorcycle gangs, and plenty other factions who all "opposed" of the United States government. Who would also become some of the law enforcements "Most Wanted."

When the Union reestablished themselves the U.S borders and coastlines became the entry into the land of the (free). Asians, Africans, Europeans, Mexicans, Latinos, alike decided to experiment with a new home. All of the abused races unsurprisingly maintain gang operations within the U.S.A!

Giving is Not Love

Giving is not love. Here in prison I can't help but notice how inmates have taken the word love to a whole other level. My understanding of love is something that comes from within you. I cannot provide love to someone. By giving them something that's small and petty. All the time here in prison I hear them say show me some love. I be like how can I show you some love when they don't know how to show themselves or another any love. Not all prisoners but most of them.

As long as you giving them what they want you would hear them say I got much love for you, much love. Then when you stop giving them you no longer hear the word much love anymore. That's not love. But when I try to show them some real love by showing some concerns for they well being by sharing some real insight with them, sharing some wisdom and knowledge with them, they don't want that.

That's best love someone could give to me. I could give some one all the money in the world that don't mean I love them. Giving from the heart is a sign of care, but true love go beyond giving. Then when they don't get it their way it's, "you ain't got no love," or "you ain't showing me no love!"

In here, there are so much superficial friendships. That's why I only have very few friends.

The World Ain't Against Me

There has been so many times I thought the world was against me. But it was me who was against myself. The way I thought, because there is a old saying that war starts in the mind. Me feeling like the world against me was all in my mind.

I always got myself in trouble with the law. I always got myself in trouble with the world that was around me. I did more wrong to myself, then anyone else ever done to me. So this is to prove I was against myself. But at that time I did not see it that way. And it was me who was my worst enemy because I was living a destructive lifestyle.

Thinking

Thinking should be our way of life
 Thinking is something we should do twice
 Thinking will make the out come of any situation look nice
 Thinking will carry us a new way of lookin' at life
 Thinking is the smart way out
 Thinking will help find our true where about
 Thinking makes living easy
 Thinking before acting keeps our head above the water
 Thinking is something we should always train ourselves to do
 And it's not always good to have someone else thinking for our self
 It's our own job to do.

Our next writer doesn't need much of introduction as he consistently sends us his writings from the Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida. Michael always paints the pages of our publications with real life situations that you can clearly see as he gives out his advice to us readers. Sometimes he writes poems, sometimes he writes articles, but he always comes through with a very important message behind his writing. McKinney has been locked down for 20 plus years. So if he's talking about something, it's because he's already experienced it. A soldier battling a war with his inner demons, McKinney comes through again with some wisdom, and shows how much of a real friend he is. Please show him some love!

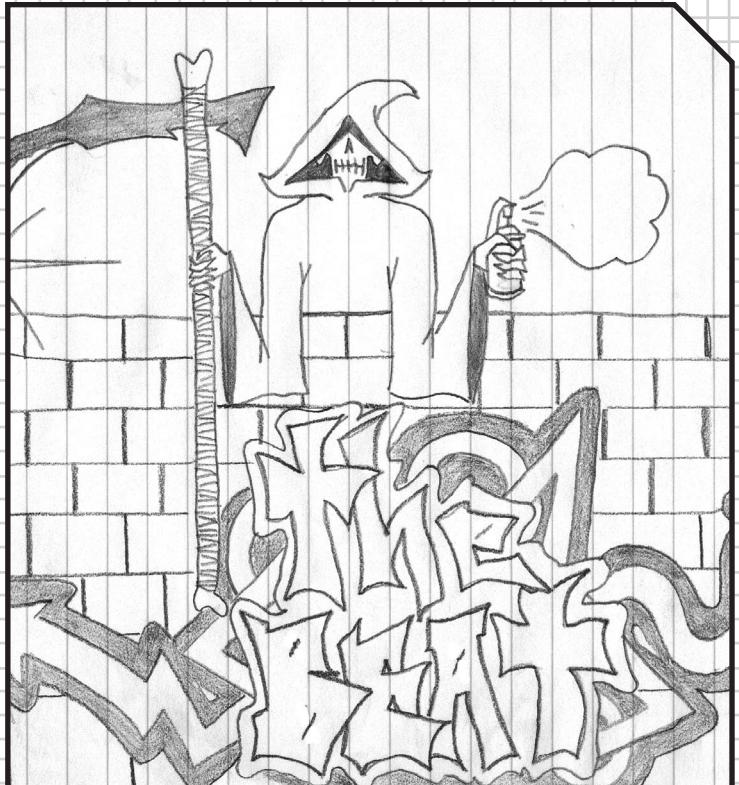
So Call Friends or Not Friend

Here in prison all the time I see inmates call each other friends, but they are so called friends to each other because from the way they treat each other. It's obvious they don't know what true friendship is. Friendship is more than just words. Now I can see what my uncle dog meant when I was young.

He use to say lil' Michael, the people you hang out with are not your friends because they always come get you when it's time for them to get into some kind of trouble. That's not what friends are for; a true friend wants for you the same as they want for themselves. A friend wants the best for his friend, not the worst. I see around me. Dudes call one another friends, but at the same time, they put they so call friend in all kinds of messed up positions.

Some people will do anything just to be friends with someone. That's not the kind of friendship I want. I want a true friendship. Some one I could trust with my life, someone I could be there for when no one else wants to be there for them.

In here, there are so much superficial friendships. That's why I only have very few friends. Friends in prison are considered as someone who helps another person throw their life away on turning their friend out on drugs or have them pop tons of pills or just being able to use them for their own reason.



Things To Take With You On Your Journey

We both know that your coming, you can't wait to get here. So before you get on the bus to your destination, I thought I would give you a little advice on how to avoid the pitfalls, I have seen so many make.

- 1) Keep your mind and body strong at all times, stress and depression will kill you faster than anything, so workout daily and read, study and learn as much as you can
- 2) Write, write, write, family, friends and positive networks you can count on.
- 3) If you're sentenced to a lot of time stay on your case, learn the law, and find lawyers, paralegals or firms that can help you.
- 4) Pen pals pass time and who knows you may find love.
- 5) Communication, respect and support should be established amongst all convicts.
- 6) Think for yourself, if not someone else will do it for you.
- 7) Speak less, listen more, make sure when you do speak, it's real. Your actions speak better than your words.
- 8) Watch who you do speak to, everyone can't hold water. So let other's actions speak.
- 9) Keep your personal affair (family, wife, business) to yourself. People will spread news like wildfire.
- 10) If you can't pay don't gamble. Don't get stuff on consignment or borrow nothing you can't replace if broken.
- 11) Stay away from drugs and homosexuals at all cost.
- 12) I wish you well, stay safe, fly low and avoid the radar.

Memories

From my turf to yours it's the same old struggle
 Drugs, gangs, death and young single mothers
 Felonies, court cases, parole or probation
 Planted evidence, snitches plea bargains,
 equal mass incarceration
 Politicians front and center, its re-election time
 November, same speech from the 1980's,
 Tough on gangs and crime.
 Mis-educated for twelve grades,
 imbedded with capitalistic ways
 You're taught to screw people over
 to succeed and just pray for better days
 Working for others never taught to own and produce for
 self
 Another slave to America with fantasies of wealth
 Oppression and anger has numbed your senses
 You act out the only way you know how
 And that's violently on another in your same
 predicament
 Sitting in these cages with time to reflect
 But for most it's too late we've been sentenced to death
 Will never see freedom, last appeal has been denied
 Too strong to breakdown, yet afraid to die
 "If I only had one more chance," I'd wake up everyday
 thinking that if I were in your shoes I would never come
 back
 Ask your own big homies
 because I know you don't want to hear it from me
 But when you get here (the pen) bring a lot of memories
 Because that's all we got left young G

Our next writer is writing to us from California Corrections Institute in Tehachapi, CA. Mr. Daniels has been consistently putting it down for the past few weeks. Coming through with some brilliant poems and words of advice, he keeps it real. He attacks the issues that we all face from various angles. Whether you're Black, White, Asian, Brown, we are all on the same boat when it comes to being pinned down in this criminal justice system. Daniels speaks from the heart with a couple dynamic pieces as he lets you know about the 'Truth Within.'

Truth Within

Trusted thoughts of madness
 itching to release your frustration
 Enough rage from oppression to last the duration
 Always on the prowl you refuse to become the prey
 It's death before dishonor until your dying day
 Pushing forward staying true never giving into the
 madness
 up against the world and things keep getting drastic
 Soul searching intoxicated with the power of a gun
 Body snatching chain reaction and you doing it for fun
 Addicted to these streets like a fiend on drugs
 The ones you really hurt is those we profess to love
 Last souls in the ghetto's young minds running wild
 Influenced by music and T.V.
 that keeps you thinking like a child
 Churches, liquor stores, and gun shops on every corner
 in your neighborhood
 You can't face reality so which one do you choose?
 Dig deeper within yourself,
 your conscious tells you right from wrong
 The truth's inside you but we choose to go wrong
 Out to get the money the best we know how
 Moving fast in the life never got to be a child
 Can't stop now you say? "I'm in too deep"
 Influences of peer pressure, you don't want to look weak
 Keep searching you will find it inside you
 But you've been too afraid to look.

Filling These Voids

Young minds untainted by lies, corruptions or drugs
 So how did we get to this point
 of young hoodlums and thugs?
 Racially segregated, criminally motivated,
 our true talents never get to peak
 Fast lane, street life headed for the belly of the beast
 Away from family, missing friends, hurt over teenage
 love
 The streets came calling and we wanted to be tough
 A senseless crime, wasted youth,
 problem child is what they label us
 reflections of a society that the government has given up
 Crying out for help but it always seems to come too late
 Should have fixed the problem early
 before I was on this side of the gate
 Can't cry over spilled milk, the damage is done
 Lost souls, misguided, still searching for love
 Filling the void with hate, love-less sex, and
 intoxications
 Body numb mind gone headed for death or incarceration
 Utilize the time wisely, today is the start of your future
 The past is behind you so prepare for the new you
 Promises to yourself that you will never do it again
 Once released, your actions should speak, instead of
 words from within.

Pleased To Meet You

What you are about to read
 Is a thought impounded by time...
 Where two minds combine
 You(rs) and mine
 To emancipate thoughts long last,
 Like how much does it really cost
 For fine wine...?
I WONDER
 What is the price?
 For a good life?
 For example
 A wife and kids
 How many more bids
 Must I wait?
 Before it's too late?
 To mate with my soul?
 Or should I jus' close my eyelids?
 Until my second chance?
 Will I take control?
I UNDERSTAND
 Life
 In the man
 Who stands with his hands
 Suspicious
 Partially extended
 Bolstering about how
 They never lost
 He never folded
 They never bended
I AM...
CERTAINTY!
 Measured by standards of
 What certainly does
 Why?
 Certainly love
 For someone or,
 Even something else
 Should not
 Make up more of the wealth
 In the economy of my life!
BUT STILL
 We look in irony
TWICE
 Catch it!

Writing to us from Wende Correctional Facility in Alden, New York our boy Nehemiah is back with some more knowledge to pound you with. Out of the writing scene for a while, or at least we hadn't come across his writing for a while, Nehemiah use to put it down heavy like a ton bricks through these pages. Back, and with more wisdom to share, Nehemiah breaks it down for you like crumbs in the bottom of the chip's bag.

It appears as it was
 In the first stolen glance at it
 Generation age?
 It appears in the static
 Of
 Paradoxical
 And what should be impossible
 Pragmatics
 But
I AWAIT
 You
 Young man
 And you
 Young woman
 Brothers and sisters
 Young Fathers and Uncles
 Mother and Aunts
 Older Nephews, Nieces and Cousins
 I await
 You to shed those last scabs
 Of what
 Life's stabbed you where it hurts
 To honor
 Your wounds and heal
THEN
 Begin to
WONDER
 Yourselves
UNDERSTAND
 Yourselves
 BECOME (and proclaim I am)
 Yourselves
 ENDURE (and remain but still)
 Yourselves
 But if you have to
 And all else fails
AWAIT
 For yourselves to arrive.

Dear Beat Within

I appreciate your acknowledgement. I've been having a really hard time at it all (i.e., lawsuits, complaints, harassment, mail violations, etc. it might appear the FOIPA business, is the only way I can secure a reply nowadays!) I am relieved. Nonetheless, it didn't absolutely turn your stomach.

After reading the documents I forwarded, if you would be so kind as to afford me the opportunity to introduce myself to your reader's Greetings! Young brothers & sisters of circumstances (YBSC). I am a thirty (30) year old "political prisoner", who's serving a twenty-five to life sentence. Though I have been in and out youth detention lock-ups since I was twelve, nothing could've prepared me for prison (which I entered while still just seventeen. Hopefully I could get up with Sandy C. or David I. and they'll let me tell ya'll about it...NOTE TO READER: ya'll got to put that in for me (smiles).

I mean, I read, volume 13.41, issue of The Beat Within

and saw so much of myself. I smiled-with that light-headed feeling we get when we're proud on certain pages. (Viz., those I left listened with underlines, mentally noted highlights, a few footnotes, creases and book marks), but on others, my exuberance turned sardonic, almost sad even. I remember when I was the "kid going home", with nothing to worry about, other than "how long of a run I could get out there", and whether or not I would "come back" (to juvi).

And after awhile that wasn't even a bother-because I always seemed to get out. The whole "revolving door" theory older heads, got to hittin' me up about. It didn't really faze me. It wasn't realistic. I heard 'em and all, but it was "surreal" ("THAT'LL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME). Ya know? And as much as I thought I was my own person and I wouldn't allow for others thoughts to change me, only after these doors closed for over a decade did I begin to understand how much of what others did it really take to truly make me up after all (and in the first place!).

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As tinnie winnie toddlers we are made to believe opportunity is but a knock and a footstep away. We've ushered through our earlier lives with tokens of endearment, that truly make us believe we can accomplish anything, we set our mind to. How many of ya'll have heard that one before? While truth, what's this "world of possibility" created by the adults in our adolescent lives. It's a rollover into our juvenile lifestyles that wind up going "rogue" (straight up AWOL!!) as we're introduced to the "world of contradiction".

Question: What exactly happen to us?

Answer: Lack in wherewithal

To no fault of our own, how many of us were ever actually shown: #1 How to figure out what we want? (to intellectualize your/our desires) e.g. of what we want and be made reacquainted with the real world of duality. Practicality vs. Impractical Thinking.

#2 What we really want to be and do?

#3 How to get it done?

#4 How even to begin something let alone finish it?

#5 Where do we begin to look and find the ghost of our minds (to even begin to do something with it?)

The Beat Within is a thing we didn't have growing up in NYC. Outside of talent shows, everywhere else you wanted

to be, you had to pay like you weigh. There was no cool cats to shoot the breeze with. You where judged by what you said. So you said very little. Your reputation was your meal ticket on the streets! The whole ordeal I know was just about as bright as a lightening bug in between flashes (or at least made us all look that way upon reflection). But the experiences still as radiant at times as those little white neon green, blue, red lights you see whenever you get light headed. Are things for years as an adult, have given me (childhood) nightmares of...

What you have with this newsletter and workshop is a cleansing! An ability to share and know whatever it is you've got to say is not only being heard, but that somebody listening actually cares! My dude that's what it is! The opportunity, to openly honor your (psychological, emotional, or spiritual) wounds, and finally give them over to the "healing" process.

Since most of you will be released or already have, your life on the outside, looking in, don't forget about your life on the inside looking out. So long as you practice the later experience in the formers release, you've got almost everybody you encounter, about your age, beat by a mile off. It's your life (and it's your job to remember that!)

It's ya' boy Nehemiah "Dick" Nash (The Hebrew Villain signing of till next time.

Kind Regards...

ALEX "MOOKIE" LOPEZ

Open Arms

I'm writing this little letter
 In the hopes it'll make me feel better
 Pick up the pieces and move on
 Better separate right from wrong
 I've opened myself up to you
 It's the best that I can do
 Better pull my head out of the clouds
 Got to figure out up from down
 Each time I bear my heart to you
 It leaves me so confused
 It's getting hard for me
 Just to be me
 I've looked myself in the eyes
 Apologized a thousand times for all the hell
 I've put you through
 Where would I be with out you?
 A million words could not explain
 That no one else can take your place
 How can I apologize?
 Sorry it took so long to realize.
 I know we've had our share of ups and downs
 But still we rise above the clouds
 Still spit against the wind
 Time and time again
 Even through my selfish pride
 You've always been there by my side
 Across the distance I can see
 Your open arms reaching out for me.

Our next writer, has been inspired by all you writers out there. His life has consisted of hard time behind bars just like a lot of hustlers, and gangsters out there. Sending his writing from Deuel Vocational Institute in Tracy, CA. Mookie's writing is as real as it gets. He's gonna put it in the simplest words and tell you where "Riding for his homies," has gotten him. He also would like to share with everyone a brief poem entitled "Open Arms," dedicated to the one and only that has never left his side.

To The Beat Within

Hello, to you all at The Beat. I am a weekly reader of your magazine. As you should know I am in Tracy prison doing a 16-month bid. The reason for this time I got is because I was caught with a mac-11. Now I'm not happy with myself for having what I had, more like feeling stupid. There was no reason for me to have the need to carry a gun. I just had it to have it just in case someone wanted to hurt me.

I'm a drop out and don't wish to play with my life over a street or color. This is my time in prison and don't wish to come back again. I've seen too much bullshhh go on in here to want to come back to this hellhole. I've lost so much 'cause of this place, family, friends, and almost my life. Never had time to have a lover. It's been 7 years now since I been with a woman, all because I wanted to go out and put in work with the homies.

Yeah, where are they at now? Now, I wouldn't say here, cause they almost had me doing life in here for riding. I have to start my life over from point A. I don't have much time to go. Four more months and I'm out and through. This whole time I took it to better myself for the good. Right now I'm in the hole and should be coming out soon.

I wrote down a poem 'cause reading everyone's work got me to put something on paper. Also the reason for the letter is to let you know I moved to another cell. Well I'm out, much love and respect.

*It's getting hard for me
 Just to be me*

From my turf to yours it's the
same old struggle
Drugs, gangs, death and young
single mothers
Felonies, court cases,
parole or probation
Planted evidence,
snitches plea bargains,
equal mass incarceration

read the rest of Mr. Daniels' BWO piece on page 53

